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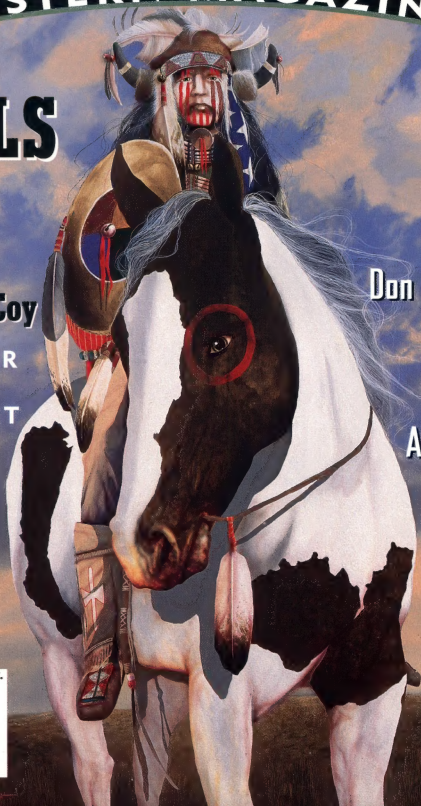

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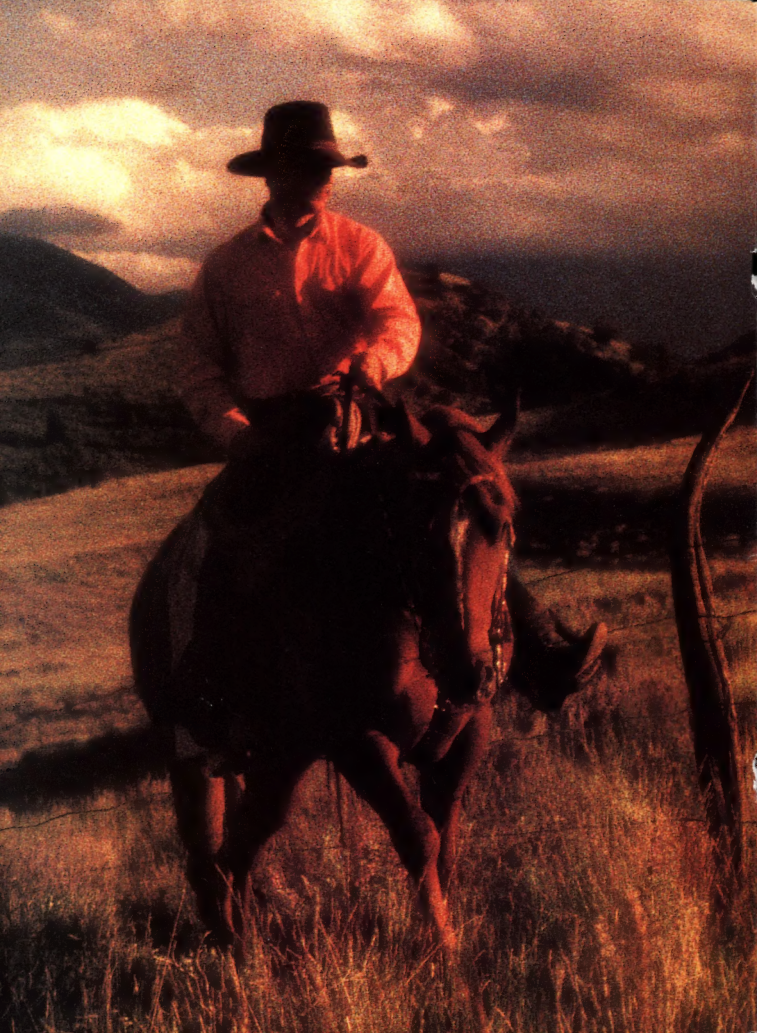

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CONTENTS

SHORT STORIES

Spoils of War
by Max McCoy 7

One Man's Word
by Preston Lewis 21

Joshua's Decision
by Ray Dorr 33

Two Women of the Prairie
by Steven Utley 45

On Patrol
by J. Bard-Collins 51

Doc Christmas, Painless Dentist
by Bill Pronzini 61

CLASSIC WESTERN STORY

A Season for Heroes
by Carla Kelly 68

DEPARTMENTS

Editor's Notes
by Elana Lore 4

Frontier Profile

Shootout at Ingalls
by Rheuben Buckner 79

Travel

A Circle of History
by Don Coldsmith 84

Interview

A Conversation with Elmore Leonard
by Dale L. Walker 94

Cover Illustration: "War Paint–Strong Medicine," by J. D. Challenger

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Louis L'Amour Western Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1994. Published bimonthly by Dell Magazines, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Magazines, at $2.95 a copy in the U.S.A., $3.95 in Canada. Six issues $17.70 in U.S.A. and possessions; $22.70 elsewhere, payable in advance, in U.S. funds (GST included in Canada). Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to LLWM, P.O. Box 5214, Harlan, IA 51593-5214. Call 1-800-888-0408 with questions about your subscription. Allow six to eight weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 1540 Broadway, New York, NY 10036. Submissions must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

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POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to *Louis L'Amour Western Magazine*, P.O. Box 5214, Harlan, IA 51593-5214. ISSN:1070-8464. GST: R123054108. Second class postage pending at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

BY ELANA LORE

Our cover illustration, "War Paint–Strong Medicine," by J. D. Challenger, has caused strong reactions already in the office.

"People either love my work or hate it," says Challenger. "Some of my paintings can be too powerful for some people. I paint what I feel, and it is my hope that my paintings may get people to feel something different than they have before."

This painting, a privately owned acrylic that measures seventy-two by ninety inches, is part of Challenger's Ghost Dance series, which depicts Plains Indians during the period of the late 1800s.

Those of you who are interested in seeing more of Challenger's work should contact the Joy Tash Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona, or Houshang's Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

While we plan to devote the magazine to publishing new, never before seen stories, we felt that it was important to keep the old favorites alive, and especially to share them with those of you who are just beginning to enjoy western fiction. So we will be offering you a classic western story in each issue. Many of these stories, at least in the beginning, will be those that have won the prestigious Golden Spur Award, given by Western Writers of America. But there will be room for other favorites. We are open to suggestions for this department from our readers. If you would like to send us a western story that was originally published before 1980, please be sure to give us your name and address so we can contact you, plus the name of the book or issue of the magazine in which the story first appeared. The address to send these stories to is: LLWM Classics, 1540 Broadway, #1509, New York, NY 10036.

You may have noticed some familiar names on our contents page. Bill Pronzini, for instance, is well-known not only as a western writer, but as a mystery writer. In this issue, he has written a humorous story about a "painless" dentist. A story about his popular series character John Quincannon, a former U.S. Treasury agent turned private investigator, and Quincannon's partner Sabina Carpenter, appeared in the premiere issue of the magazine. We are happy to say that we will be seeing more stories from Bill in future issues.

Dale L. Walker, who has interviewed Elmore Leonard in this issue and John Jakes in our premiere issue, is currently the president of Western Writers of America. He is also the author of thirteen books, most of them about the Old West, writes a column called "Westerns" for the *Rocky Mountain News* in Denver, and is also considered an expert on Jack London. He has been a great help in the startup of this magazine.

Don Coldsmith, who has written our travel piece, "A Circle of History," is a retired physician and the author of the Spanish Bit Saga historical novels about the Indians of the Great Plains. The stories begin with the Indians' earliest contact with Europeans. One of my most vivid memories from these books is Don's depiction of Indians feasting on raw liver after a lean winter without meat.

In future issues, I would like to devote much of this space to telling you about our authors and other work of theirs that you may be interested in reading. While these three men have had long publishing careers, there will be plenty of room in the magazine for new writers. As Beau L'Amour said in his guest editorial in our premiere issue, his father liked to encourage new writers, and so we consider discovering new talent an important part of the magazine's purpose.

If you are a writer yourself, you should know that we read all submissions sent to the magazine. We do request that you send us a self-addressed, stamped, number ten envelope for our writers' guidelines before you submit. The address is: LLWM Guidelines, 1540 Broadway, #1509, New York, NY 10036.

Now that I have given out our New York address twice, I feel compelled to mention that this isn't where you should contact us if you want to subscribe to the magazine, or have questions about a subscription you already have. That address is: LLWM, Box 5214, Harlan, IA 51593-5214. We also have a toll-free subscription number, which is 1-800-888-0408.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the magazine.

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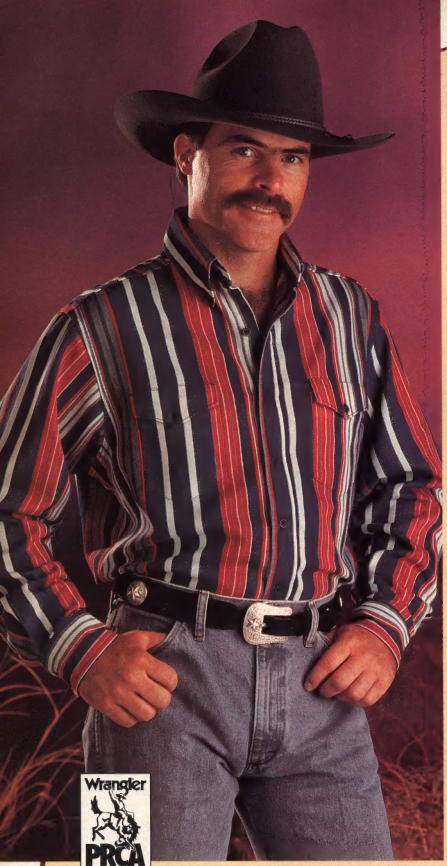

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THE WORLD'S LARGEST WESTERN STORES AND CATALOG

BY MAX McCOY

Spoils of War

My mother was Eliza Gamble. Together we walked the twenty miles from our farm in Shelby County to the federal prison at Palmyra in one day. Mother was twenty-six years old, with chestnut hair and hazel eyes, and over her dress she wore a man's butternut coat with a .36-caliber Manhattan revolver tucked into the left pocket. I know she was beautiful, because I have before me a daguerreotype that survived the war. I was too young to understand all that happened that day, but now I know that she loved my father and was trying to save his life.

ILLUSTRATION BY JULIAN ALLEN

I had turned ten that month, but I still held tightly to the sleeve of Mother's ragged coat as we trudged to the northeast along the old road that paralleled the Hannibal & St. Joseph tracks. We had left the farm before dawn. It was cold, even for October, and our breath hung ghostlike in the air before us. I remember thinking that a little bit of our souls was being expelled with every breath. Every so often I would glance wistfully at the rails. We used to ride the train to Palmyra when Father had business there, but that was before he went off in July to fight the Yankees with Col. Joe Porter and never came back.

When the mail train clattered by I had some childish hope that it would stop and some kindly conductor would let us aboard. It did not stop, of course. The train was bristling with bluecoats, and as it passed they shouted things that I could not understand over the clamor of the locomotive.

It seemed warmer after the sun came up. The trees were bursting with fall colors—orange and yellow and red—and our path was carpeted by their brilliant leaves. Autumn had always been my mother's favorite time of year, but on this trip she hardly seemed to notice the trees. Every so often she would shift the position of the revolver in her pocket, as if its weight were becoming unbearable.

She had taken the loaded and capped revolver from the body of a guerrilla lieutenant who, the week before, had staggered onto our farm to die.

About midmorning we approached the bridge across the Salt River. At each end of the bridge, away from the tracks and almost upon the water, was a two-story blockhouse of thick, roughhewn logs. There was a soldier at each end of the bridge, and there must have been more soldiers inside the blockhouses, because wood smoke drifted from the stacks.

Mother studied these blockhouses for some time. She was afraid of the Yankees, but there seemed to be no other way across. The river had not yet frozen solid, and the water was too cold to attempt to swim. Her mind made up, she grasped my hand and pulled me along as she marched down the tracks to the bridge.

"Halt," the soldier called as we drew close.

Mother looked surprised.

"It's cold and we'd like to reach the other side," she said, then added with venom, *"if* you don't mind."

"I'm sorry, ma'am," the soldier said.

He was young, perhaps eighteen years old, and he wore the chevrons of a corporal. "We have orders to stop all civilians attempting to cross the Salt."

"Whatever for?" she asked sharply. "This is still our bridge and our river, is it not?"

"Your people keep burning their own bridge," he said sourly. "Nobody is allowed across the river without a military pass. Do you have a pass?"

THE TRAIN WAS BRISTLING WITH BLUECOATS, AND AS IT PASSED THEY SHOUTED THINGS THAT I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND.

"I am Eliza Gamble," she said. "We are on our way to the federal prison at Palmyra to visit my husband, John Gamble. It may be the last time the boy ever sees his father."

The corporal swallowed and looked away.

"Is he one of the ten?" he asked.

"I don't know," Mother said, and she reached into the left pocket of her coat. Standing close to her, I could see the butt of the revolver inside the pocket, and for a moment I was filled with horror that she would shoot this young Yankee. What she produced instead was a copy of the Shelbina newspaper. "It says here that the names of the ten to be executed shall be announced today."

The corporal took the newspaper—which for both sides was the usual means of communication with the enemy—and read the following black-bordered notice:

> To Joseph C. Porter. Sir: This is to notify you that the deadline has passed for the safe return of Andrew Allsman to his family and I can only presume his murder. Ten men who have belonged to your band, and unlawfully sworn by you to carry arms against the government of the United States, and who are now in custody, will be shot dead on Saturday, the 18th of October, 1862, as a meet reward for this crime. The names of the ten will be posted on Friday before the execution. Yours, et cetera. Signed, W. R. Strachan, Provost Marshal General, District Northeast, Missouri.

I knew that Father had been wounded at Auxvasse Creek and had later been captured, but the full implication of the situation did not become clear to me until that moment on the trestle. Tears came to my eyes. I bit my lip to

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try to stem the flow, but the drops rolled down my cheeks anyway. Mother knelt and wiped them away with a rag.

"Now, Elijah," she said. "We must be brave. Father would not want you to cry. He was taken while doing his duty and we should be proud of him."

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

But I could not control my tears.

I stood there for what seemed the longest time, with my mother kneeling before me and dabbing the tears away. My cheeks were hot with shame and with anger, for I knew she had deliberately withheld information about my father's predicament until my reaction could be aimed for best effect. The display was not lost on the soldier, who was little more than a boy himself.

"Madam, forgive me," the corporal said. His eyes looked red and watery as well. "You may pass." He made an exaggerated wave to the guard at the other end to indicate that we could proceed unhampered.

"Thank you," Mother said as she rose from her knees. "You are almost too kind to be a Yankee."

That is how we crossed the Salt.

The war had seemed like some kind of grand game when it started. Shelby County and the counties around us were so pro-Southern that the area was called "Little Dixie." Wives and girlfriends were kept busy stitching guerrilla shirts—a kind of loose-fitting hunting shirt with big pockets and fancy needlework, and gathered with a rosette in front. There was lots of talk early on about giving the Yankees a whipping, but rarely did a skirmish result in more than a handful of casualties. With prisoners, the custom was to grant a field parole—which was a scrap of paper bearing a promise never again to take up arms and so forth—and to send them home. The boys would often collect three or four such parole and, carrying the most recent one in their jacket, would continue to slip away to become part-time soldiers.

These irregular troops made up much of the command of old Joe Porter and others, and so harassed the forces of occupation that it wasn't long before the Yankees became desperate. Martial law was declared across the state in August of 1861, and new orders called for the execution of guerrillas upon the spot. Instead of quelling the insurrection, this only made the partisans more desperate, and the fighting became worse. Men who had been content to fight to a draw were now locked in a battle to the death.

Houses were searched at random for men and arms, and these searches were often nothing more than an excuse for outright stealing. Loyalty bonds, some as high as ten thousand dollars, were extracted by provost marshals from wealthy families suspected of Southern sympathies. Poorer families were likely to lose their crops, their stock, or anything they had left of value. The provost marshal system was universally corrupt, and most folks were more scared of the provost than the devil himself. Strachan, who was the head of the military police in our corner of the state, was particularly hated because he had turned against his neighbors; he had grown up in Shelby County and had even fought in the Mexican War with my grandfather, Isaiah Dunbar, who was killed during the assault at El Moro.

But the worst was yet to come. Order Number Nineteen—issued in July of that year—called for all men, regardless of loyalties, to report to the nearest Union military post for duty. Thousands of men who previously had considered themselves neutral were suddenly forced to pick a side. To the consternation of the federals, most picked the South. Father threw in his lot with Porter because, he said, we Gambles still had plenty of relatives in Georgia and it wouldn't be proper to side against family.

Father, who didn't have a uniform and carried an old long rifle and a belt knife, caught up with Porter's army exactly one day before the battle of Auxvasse Creek. There, Porter's command was shot to pieces when Odon Guitar brought his cannon to bear on the irregulars hidden in the timber along the creek. Fifty-two men were killed and more than a hundred were wounded. Porter and a few of his men escaped to the north.

MARTIAL LAW WAS DECLARED ACROSS THE STATE IN AUGUST OF 1861, AND NEW ORDERS CALLED FOR EXECUTION OF GUERRILLAS ON THE SPOT.

Andy Allsman, the man Strachan wanted returned, was a Yankee informant who had been captured when Porter—with a newly formed command—had raided Palmyra in September. Porter held Palmyra for only two hours, but he succeeded in liberating forty-five inmates from the federal prison, capturing a quantity of arms and ammunition, and shoot-

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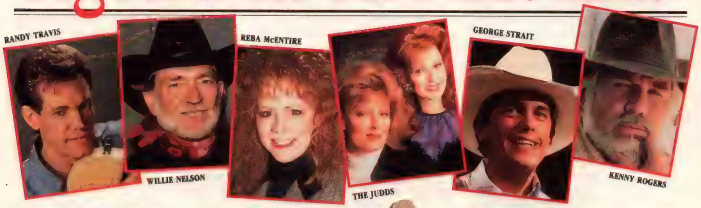

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ing the living hell out of the large copper ball that graced the cupola atop the Marion County Courthouse. I suppose Porter's men considered it to be some type of target practice, but it was just vandalism, perhaps because most of them were fresh off the farm and there wasn't much else to shoot at. In all, it wasn't much of a fight. There were about a hundred Yankees wisely holed up in the brick courthouse and a couple of other brick buildings and they had only two men wounded. Porter's losses, from a force of four hundred, were one man killed and another wounded. They should have left it at that.

On the way out of town Porter grabbed Allsman from his home, apparently as an afterthought, and what became of the Yankee sympathizer after that is a mystery. Some say he was tortured to death, others say he was shot by a detail that was assigned to escort him back to the Union commander. In either case, Allsman was never seen again. At the time mother that my stomach was paining me. She nodded and said we would stop soon for a bite to eat. A couple of miles farther we came to a farm, and Mother bade me to sit on a log near the path and keep still while she gathered lunch. She disappeared into the brush and was gone about twenty minutes when I heard the baying of hounds and a few hoarse shouts. I did not like being left alone, and the commotion at the farm made it nearly impossible to sit still. But I did as I was told, and when Mother came back she smiled gently and matter-of-factly began unloading food from the right pocket of her coat. There were two apples, a couple of pieces of cornbread, and a wedge of cheese. It had been a long time since we had had cheese.

Mother sat on the log with me and gave me the cornbread and cheese while she ate one of the apples. The cornbread was as hard as a rock, and the cheese a mite green, but I was so hungry it seemed like a feast. I had the

Of all the meals I've had in my life, I remember that meager lunch with Mother the best.

of the trip to Palmyra I hated Andy Allsman—hated him for being a Union sympathizer and because of the influence his abduction had on my family. As terrible as his fate must have been, I reckoned he had it coming—after all, the only man in town that voted for Abe Lincoln in the election of 1860 was run out of town on a rail. What could a Yankee informant expect?

I was hungry when we started out, and by midday I had the cramps, a sensation which had become all too familiar. I told my other apple for dessert. There was a spring-fed creek nearby and we washed it all down with cupped handfuls of ice-cold water. It's strange, but of all the meals I've had in my life—and I have lived fairly high upon the hog at times—I remember that meager lunch with Mother the best. Perhaps it is because of the almost certain knowledge that she had stolen, perhaps at the point of a gun, so I could eat.

Thus restored, we again took up the road.

The sun was setting by the time we reached Palmyra. I was tired and footsore and wanted to rest, but Mother insisted we push on to the federal prison at the corner of Dickerson and Lafayette. The prison, which had been constructed a few years earlier as the Marion County Jail, was a large two-story brick building with a covered porch. On the porch stood a soldier. A sign identified the office he protected as provost marshal headquarters, and yellow lamplight shone from the shaded windows.

"This is the place," Mother said. She paused, and leaned down close as she pretended to wipe dirt from my cheeks. "This is very serious, Elijah. It's important that you keep still no matter what happens. Do you understand?"

I nodded. Then we stepped onto the porch and Mother addressed the soldier. "Begging your pardon, but have the names of the ten been posted?"

The soldier pointed to a slip of paper nailed to a post. Mother had to take it down and carry it near the window to have enough light to read it. When she replaced it upon the nail, her hands shook.

"I have traveled some distance and I desire a word with the provost marshal," she said in an even voice.

"Sorry, ma'am," the soldier replied. "Provost Marshal General Strachan is not available. Come back tomorrow."

"Tomorrow will be too late," she said gently. In the light thrown from the window I could see her cheeks begin to redden. "I really must speak with him tonight. It is a matter of some importance."

"There is nothing I can do. Come back tomorrow."

Mother squared her shoulders and lifted her chin.

"You don't understand," she said. "My son and I have walked all the way from our farm in Shelby County. I must be allowed an audience with the marshal."

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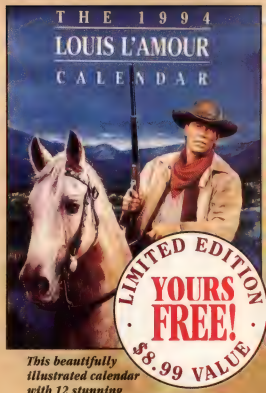

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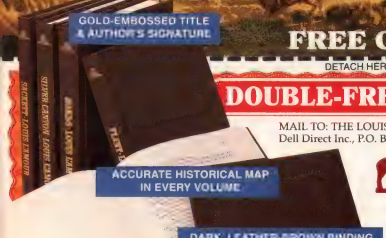
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MOTHER TOOK THE GLASS OF BRANDY STRACHAN OFFERED AND, TO MY SURPRISE, DRAINED IT IN ONE DRAFT.

The soldier shook his head.

"Now see here," she said, her voice rising. "My husband is scheduled to be shot tomorrow, and I must speak with Provost Marshal General Strachan." She spat the name out like a curse. "There has been some terrible mistake. *I will set things right.*"

She had been shouting. Her bosom heaved with each breath, the muscles in her jaw were clenched, and her lips were pursed in a hard, thin line. The soldier stood mute and seemingly impotent before this angry woman, despite the heavy rifle with the gleaming bayonet he held.

The door opened, spilling a rectangle of light onto the porch, and the soldier snapped to attention. Out of the doorway stepped a heavy, middle-aged man, with dark hair and beard, smoking a cigar. His back was to the light, so I could not see his face. He wore a nondescript blue uniform that seemed to lack insignia of any kind. The aroma of meat and potatoes wafted onto the porch, and my stomach gurgled in response. He took the cigar from his mouth and asked the soldier what the trouble was.

"Sir. This female has demanded an audience. She says her husband is one of the ten."

"Is that so?" the man asked. "Come closer, madam, into the light," he urged, and gestured with the hand that held the cigar. The glowing red tip traced a semicircle in the darkness.

Mother smoothed her hair and stepped forward, extending her hand. The man clutched it in his huge, pawlike grip. He peered intensely at her face.

"I believe I know this woman," he said. "It has been some years, but you are Eliza Dunbar, are you not?"

"Why, yes, I am," she said coyly. "Or rather, that was my maiden name. I believe my father was with you in Company I of Wilcock's Extra Battalion during the Mexican campaign."

I could scarcely believe my ears. Why, she was treating this man—the man responsible for ordering my father's execution—like an old friend. The soldier and I exchanged curious glances.

"Why not step inside, out of the cold?" Strachan suggested.

Mother grasped my wrist and pulled me along as she stepped into Strachan's headquarters. The room looked more like a parlor than an office. There was expensive furniture everywhere, and in the middle of the room was a table laid with fine silver and a gleaming white tablecloth. There were plates of roast beef, potatoes, carrots, and dishes I had never seen before. Candles flickered at either end of the table.

Strachan shut the door and moved to his desk, which was along one wall beneath a map of the Northeast District of Missouri. His face was near the lamp now, and I could see that his eyes were yellowed and bloodshot. His cheeks were sunken, and his nose was mottled by broken veins.

"I had just finished dinner," he said. "Perhaps you would care to partake."

"Goodness, no—I couldn't," Mother said, although she had eaten less than I had that day. "But I imagine Elijah wouldn't mind eating again. You know how boys are."

Strachan grunted and motioned for me to proceed. I looked at Mother, and she nodded. I carefully filled a plate, and watched while Strachan produced a bottle of brandy and two glasses from a desk drawer. His yellow eyes never left Mother's.

"May I take your coat?"

"Thank you, but I believe I am still chilled from the night."

"Here, this will help to warm you," he said as he filled the glasses. "Which one of the ten is yours?"

Mother took the glass he offered and, to my surprise, drained it in one draft.

She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and extended the glass for more.

"My husband is John Gamble," Mother said, her voice somewhat husky from the brandy. "He is a good man."

"A number of good men have died in this war. Go on."

"I'm certain that there must have been some kind of mistake," she said. "You see, he really is not a soldier. He's a farmer. That is all he has known."

"But he was captured among Porter's men at Auxvasse Creek. And he is a Southern sympathizer. Our information as to that regard is very detailed."

"My husband is a peace Democrat."

"Then why did he join with Porter?"

"He felt he had no choice," Mother said softly.

Strachan drummed his fingers on the desk, as if he were thinking. The cigar wreathed his head in smoke. I ate as quietly as I could.

Mother polished off what remained of the second glass of brandy, and motioned for another.

"Are you not yet warm?" Strachan asked.

"I believe that I am approaching that condition," she said.

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Strachan smiled.

"Mrs. Gamble, I don't believe that your problem is insoluble. There are a number of ways we might go about it. Perhaps what is called for . . . is a private conference."

Mother forced a smile.

"Yes," she said. "That might indeed be the very thing."

Strachan smiled more broadly, revealing a row of chipped and tobacco-stained teeth. He filled

"ANOTHER REPLACEMENT?" THE JAILER ASKED, COCKING HIS EYEBROW. "I THOUGHT THAT AFTER THE HUMPHREY WOMAN VISITED—"

Mother's glass once more, and glanced impatiently at my half-eaten plate of food.

"Before sequestering ourselves," my mother said pleasantly, "I would of course need some manner of assurance that my problem can be resolved." I noticed that her left hand was in her jacket pocket. "It wouldn't be anything elaborate, you understand. A written order specifying my husband's release would be sufficient."

Strachan hesitated.

"Release?" he asked. "I thought we were bargaining for a stay of execution."

"It is my understanding," Mother said, "that John is severely wounded. He needs proper care. To keep him in prison would merely postpone his demise. A full parole is needed."

Strachan grunted.

"You are asking for quite a lot," he said.

"Think of what you are asking of me," she said, and it was the first time in the conversation that I heard anger in her voice. Then she continued, somewhat softer: "A woman's virtue is no cheap thing. Most folks say it is better to be dead than to surrender it. But I say to live without the one you love is a kind of living death, and I give myself to you willingly—*willingly*, you understand—in exchange for the release of my husband. Do we have a deal, Marshal Strachan?"

He said nothing.

Mother stood to go.

"Yes, we have a deal," he said. "But I am reluctant to put anything so delicate in writing," he said. "There might be questions of an embarrassing nature from the military command at St. Louis. I would prefer to give the order in person."

"Sir, again I ask you to consider the delicacy of the thing that I am surrendering," she said. "There must be some assurances before this private audience. Speak the order, if you must, but speak it now."

"And what assurance do I have that you will keep the bargain?"

"You have the word of a woman who loves her husband," Mother said. "I will keep the bargain. Give the order."

"This audience," he said. "It will be of some length?"

"Yes. Give the order."

Strachan crossed to the door and called for the guard.

"Get the jailer," Strachan said. In a few minutes the jailer appeared, a tough-looking career soldier with sergeant's stripes upon his sleeve. He stood uncomfortably in the room, as if he were afraid he would break something.

"This woman's husband is to be released to her," Strachan told him. "She will be down for him sometime tonight. Replace him on the list of ten with . . . oh, what is the name? . . . Lake. Eleazer Lake."

"Another replacement?" the jailed asked, cocking his eyebrow. "I thought that after the Humphrey woman visited—"

"That will be enough, Sergeant," Strachan said. "Do you understand these orders?"

"Yes, sir."

"Dismissed."

The jailer saluted, turned on his heel, and strode out. Strachan turned to Mother and asked if she was satisfied.

"Quite," she said.

"Are you finished?" he asked me.

I nodded and laid down the plate.

"Then you can wait outside."

I looked at Mother.

"It's all right, Elijah," she said, smiling. "You wait outside on the porch and I will be along directly." She squeezed my arm as I walked past. Then she took off her coat and laid it carefully in a chair.

There was a wooden bench on the porch outside and that is where I waited. I had some vague notion of what was taking place in Strachan's office, and it made me ill. Despite the cold, I broke out in a sweat. My stomach churned. Suddenly I was racing to the end of the porch, a column of vomit scalding my throat, and then I was on my hands and knees on the freezing ground while my stomach purged itself of its contents.

When I could raise my head again, I spied two wagons in the yard, off to one side, close to a rail fence. I had not seen them before because they had been hidden from my view by the corner of the building. In the beds of the wagons, shimmering ghostlike in the moonlight, were ten newly made pine coffins.

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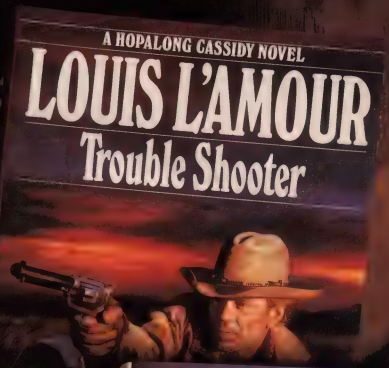

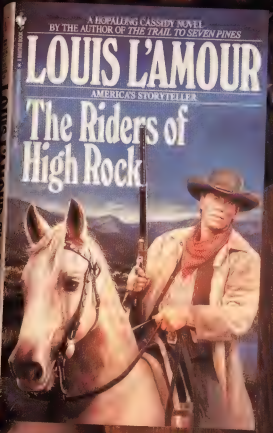
A HOPALONG CASSIDY NOVEL
BY THE AUTHOR OF THE TRAIL TO SEVEN PINES
LOUIS L'AMOUR
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The Riders of High Rock

The soldier standing guard picked me up, cleaned me off, and returned me to the wooden bench. I was shivering. He said a few words to another soldier who passed and I was soon brought a blanket. Then I must have fallen asleep, because the next thing I remember is my mother's hand upon my cheek.

"Come, Elijah," she said.

It was past midnight, because the soldier standing guard was a different man. From the light that still shone through the window, I could see Mother's face clearly. She looked tired and much older. There was a terrible sadness that tugged at her eyes and the corners of her mouth. She smelled of Strachan's cigar.

We went around to the side of the building, to an iron gate that blocked a set of steps leading down to the prison in the cellar. The gate was open, however, and a couple of soldiers were struggling up the steps.

Mother placed her hand on my shoulder to keep me back as they passed. They were carrying a man. His clothes were little more than rags. His arms dangled from their sockets, and his knuckles were bloody from banging against the rough steps. He was missing his right leg from the knee down, and a bloody rag was wrapped around the stump. His head was thrown back, his mouth was agape, and his open, unseeing eyes stared upward at the stars. No cloud of vapor came from his mouth. He was dead, and obviously had been for some hours.

There was a sudden pain in my shoulder as my mother's grip turned viselike. The realization struck me a few moments later that the dead man being carried out of the prison was Father. I pried Mother's fingers from my shoulder and looked questioningly up at her. I was dazed, unfeeling, too numb to cry. She placed her hand inside her left coat pocket. She held it there for the longest time after the gate had been locked and the body dumped unceremoniously into one of the wagons. Her eyes were vacant, her face expressionless. Keys jingled as the jailer came around the corner. Mother looked up. Suddenly, there was a glint of determination in her eyes. She looked at me and placed a forefinger to her lips.

The jailer appeared, carrying a ring of keys and a coal oil lantern. He unlocked the gate and threw it open, and we followed him down. I had to concentrate on my feet to keep from stumbling. In the lantern light, the spots of fresh blood upon the steps appeared an unnatural red. The jail was divided into two huge cells separated by a corridor, and each cell was full of men.

"Which one is your husband?" the jailer asked.

"I don't see him," Mother said.

"The condemned are all here in the east block," the jailer said. He unlocked the gate to that cell.

"It is terribly dark, and I don't want to call out for fear of waking the men who are sleeping," she said. "May I have the lantern?"

The jailer handed over the light, and stood beside the cell door with his revolver drawn while Mother went inside. She went from man to man, studying each of the faces, sometimes kneeling on the dirty straw to get a better look. She inspected perhaps half a dozen before proclaiming softly that she had found him. She placed the lantern down to one side and embraced the chosen, using the shadow of her body to hide the man's undoubted look of surprise. Then she scooped up the lantern and began leading him toward the cell door.

He walked unsteadily, shuffling his feet, and he leaned on the bars for support as he came through the door. He was younger than Father, perhaps twenty-five. He had long, sand-colored hair and an unkempt beard of a somewhat darker shade. He wore a ragged gray jacket with yellow trim that was missing many buttons.

"Stu Akers is your husband?" the jailer asked. It occurred to me that Strachan had not mentioned a name when giving the jailer his instructions.

"Yes," Mother said sharply, and draped one of the man's arms around her neck. "Elijah. Get on the other side and help your father up these steps."

I reluctantly slipped beneath the man's arm. He smelled of sweat and blood and the stuff that belongs in thunder buckets. Together we carried him up the steps, and it was dead weight, like carrying a hundred-pound sack of grain. As we reached the top, and the fresh night air, he gained some strength and did not sag so heavily between us.

The jailer locked the door behind us.

We were almost to the street when the jailer called out.

"Ma'am," he said.

We stopped. Mother's right hand clutched Akers's arm, but I saw her left go back into the pocket of her butternut coat. This time she did pull out the revolver, and she held it close to her.

The jailer came up behind us.

"I know that ain't your husband."

Mother thumbed back the hammer. The cylinder rotated and locked into place with a metallic click that was so sharp it sent a chill down my spine.

"Stu Akers doesn't have a wife," the jailer said smugly. "I know because his sister told me so when she inquired today about claiming his body afterward. She also told me he was quite the rake, and there would be more than one woman in Hannibal shedding tears for him tomorrow." Then the jailer sucked in his breath before adding: "If either of you has any

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regard for your immortal souls —or for the welfare of your poor little bastard—you had best find a preacher and make things legal."

Then he turned and walked away.

Mother sighed and eased the hammer down. She allowed that she probably should have shot the jailer for what he said about my paternity. Then she handed the revolver to Akers, who slipped it into the waistband of his trousers.

"I don't understand," Akers said. His voice was rough, as if he hadn't spoken in a long time. "Why me?"

"Your eyes," Mother said wearily. "My husband's eyes were the same shade of blue."

We set off down the Hannibal road, never to return to the farm in Shelby County. Of course there was really nothing to go back to—just an empty house and barren fields—but I think my mother was also saving my father from the final indignity of bringing Stu Akers there.

I started to cry then, silent tears streaming down my cheeks in the darkness. I was sorry for all of it, for my mother and my dead father and the ten men who would, in the morning, sit upon their own coffins and face the firing squad. Hell, I was even sorry for the Yankee informer Andy Allsman—and everyone else who had died in this miserable war. About the only person I wasn't sorry for was Strachan. Already I was imagining how the revolver would feel in *my* hand.

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BY PRESTON LEWIS

ONE MAN'S WORD

STANDING BENEATH A RED OAK TREE, Shad Holt pulled the gold stem-wind watch from his vest pocket and stared at the time, then at the crowd, fully two hundred strong in back of the Moshulatubbe District Courthouse. The mood was as dreary as the blanket of gray clouds overhead.

Turning to Dan Wilborn, Holt cocked his head and spoke loudly enough for his pronouncement to be heard above the hushed conversations of the assembled crowd. "The damn Injun ain't coming."

Wilborn shifted nervously from foot to foot, but Holt continued his taunt by lifting the watch chest high and staring down his arrogant nose at the time. "Twenty-seven minutes until noon. I'll bet any takers he won't be here by noon, or ever." Holt snapped the watch cover shut, as if to punctuate his challenge. "Birge Tatum'd be a fool to come to his own execution."

Three days ago, Birge Tatum had fled into the woods on his best horse.

All dark and solemn, the silent faces glaring at Holt were as proud as their Choctaw race. The men said nothing with their tongues, but their eyes spoke their disdain.

Holt laughed as he shoved the watch back in his vest pocket, then balled his fists, planted them on his hips, and rocked on the heels of his shoes, silently challenging the Choctaw men around him.

Fidgeting beside Holt, Wilborn pried his index finger between his tight collar and fleshy neck. "I know how Custer felt," Wilborn whispered as he yanked a soiled handkerchief from his pocket and patted nervously at his mouth.

"Those Injuns didn't wear suits and ties like these," Holt replied. "They were warriors!" He slowly scanned the crowd that had gathered on three sides of the Choctaw sheriff and deputy. The human horseshoe opened toward the creek where Birge Tatum's wife, three daughters, and two daughters-in-law stood, nervously consoling one another. The whole Tatum family had arrived by wagon and horseback the day before and made camp for a somber night. Some whispered that Birge Tatum had returned during the night to enjoy his wife a final time, but Holt figured that story was as empty as the coffin in the back of the wagon.

Over the dull weathered wood of the wagon sideboards, Holt could see the shiny pine of the new coffin. *What fools, the Choctaw,* he thought. The stiff-lipped women and the coffin were decoys, nothing more. Most likely, Birge Tatum already had escaped to Chickasaw country, outside the reach of Choctaw law. *What a foolish law,* thought Holt, *that allows a condemned man to ride away from the court of his conviction solely on his promise to return on the day of his execution.* In the four months since being sentenced to die, Birge Tatum had stayed at his farm, going about his business as if he had an appointment with a banker or a dentist, instead of an appointment with death. Then three days ago, as word had it, Birge Tatum had grabbed his favorite rifle, bought three cartons of ammunition, and fled into the woods on his best horse. These fool Choctaws actually believed he would show. Holt shook his head. Though he had heard much of Birge Tatum, Holt had never seen him—never would!

The Choctaw had taken to the white man's ways—farming the land, arguing tribal politics, and wearing suits and ties—better than most Indians. Birge Tatum, like Oscar Crane, had been a respected farmer until he sipped at a jug of illegal rotgut whiskey and got into an argument with Crane over whether Choctaw tribal lands should be parceled out to individuals or maintained under communal control. Tempers had flared like a match on bad whiskey, and Oscar Crane had died of Tatum's knife to the heart.

Again Holt pulled his watch from his vest pocket and flipped open the gold case. "Quarter of twelve," he announced. "No takers and no sign of Birge Tatum. He can't hold to his word any better than he can hold his whiskey."

Dan Wilborn coughed nervously and edged away from Shad Holt.

"Damn fool Injuns," Holt sneered as he snapped the watch case shut and slid the timepiece back in his vest pocket. When he looked up, he was startled by the Choctaw standing not two feet from his face. The man had approached so quickly, yet so silently, that Holt caught his breath for an instant. Then he studied the man, taking in a Choctaw no more than twenty-five years old, with a long face, broad nose, high cheekbones, thick eyebrows, and hair as black as his regard for Holt. His eyes shone like twin coals, searing Holt with their intense hatred.

"You're blocking my view, Young Buck," Holt said, hoping his condescending moniker disguised the quiver of fear in his voice.

"With you I will wager," the Choctaw said. "What value you most?"

Holt retreated a step, stroking his jaw. "You name the bet."

Young Buck crossed his arms over his chest. "What value you most?" The Choctaw's dark eyes burned with disgust.

"My money, my horse?" Holt finally declared, absently fingering his watch.

The Choctaw spat at Holt's side. "White man knows little then of value. Choctaw value life most. Man can work for money and raise more horses, but man has only one life. My life against yours."

Holt gasped and would have retreated another step, but his knees had turned as mushy as his resolve to bet. "You're a fool," he managed, his words breaking like his confidence.

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"I will not touch a coward's flesh," Young Buck said. "My word is true."

"You're a coward." The Choctaw nodded.

Holt stared beyond the somber man and saw nothing but contempt in the hard expressions of the other Indians. Even Dan Wilborn retreated from him. "You're a fool," Holt repeated.

"No, I am Choctaw. White man a coward. You tell many to make wager, then refuse one Choctaw equal bet. If you're afraid of losing your life, then bet your watch. It's a trinket."

Fingering the watch, then slowly pulling it from his vest pocket, Holt hesitated until he saw the angry faces watching him. Reluctantly, he nodded. "It's a gold watch, worth seventy-five dollars or more. My watch against your watch." His voice quivered like a leaf in the breeze.

"I carry no watch," the Choctaw said.

Holt grinned. "Then no bet after all!"

"I'm no coward," the Choctaw said. "Your watch against my life if Birge Tatum doesn't come as he said he would."

"By noon?"

The Choctaw nodded.

Snapping open the watch, Holt noted the time—11:52. Just eight minutes until noon. Only a fool would show up at his own execution. This was a sure bet. Not that he had the courage to kill the Choctaw when he won, but he could trade the man's life for something of value. Holt grinned. "Agreed, Young Buck." Depositing the watch in his left palm, he extended his right hand toward the Choctaw, figuring to seal the bet with a handshake.

Young Buck, his own arms crossed over his chest, made no effort to return the gesture. "I will not touch a coward's flesh. My word is true and the witnesses are many."

Holt's lips tightened and his face reddened at the affront. He looked among the crowd for allies, but saw only the hard stares of the assembled Choctaw. He avoided their glaring eyes by studying the pocket watch's second hand as it revolved toward noon.

At four minutes until noon, Holt quickly surveyed the crowd, noting a few latecomers arriving on horseback or emerging from the woods across the creek. At two minutes until noon, Holt glanced around more confidently. Nothing had changed, except a clump of men had gathered at the wagon to remove the coffin. Holt grinned to himself. The Choctaw were maintaining the charade to the very moment of noon. Holt would have snickered, but the crowd had grown deathly quiet, as if every man knew Young Buck was about to lose his wager—and his life.

Everyone watched the wagon, where one man in a black slouch hat stood out from the others by the rifle he carried in his hand. No one else had a visible weapon except the lawmen. The armed man helped four other men carry the coffin by its rope handles toward the sheriff, who stood with his arms folded, his expression as solemn as an undertaker's. The pallbearers for a funeral that would not be deposited the coffin on the cold ground by the sheriff, then retreated to the wagon. They were, thought Holt, putting up a good pretense that Birge Tatum would arrive for his own death. With seconds to go until noon, Holt felt his confidence surging again. He watched the second hand pass the twelve a final time on his watch, then snapped the case shut.

"It's twelve noon," he announced loudly as he turned to the arrogant Choctaw who had challenged him. "You lose."

Young Buck shook his head. "No! He is here."

Holt swallowed hard, then scanned the crowd, but he did not know Birge Tatum by sight. How could he have arrived without creating a commotion? Everyone was so stoic. Even the sheriff, who stood on the blanket where Birge Tatum would kneel to die, betrayed no emotion.

The crowd was still except for the man with the black slouch hat on his head and the rifle clasped in his hand. Unlike the others, in suits and ties, he wore a blue work shirt and work britches. Could the man with the rifle be Birge Tatum? Holt wondered. Surely a condemned man would not, of his own free will, come to his own execution? And if indeed he did, why would he carry a rifle, except to use the weapon to escape death? Even so, all heads seemed to point toward and all eyes seemed to focus upon the man in the slouch hat—the man who had helped carry the coffin to the spot where the condemned would die.

This was a proud man with a strong jaw and sturdy shoulders. He said nothing, but approached each of the four men who had helped move the coffin. He shook the hand of each, then nodded. He stepped past the coffin and looked around the crowd, his gaze seem-

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"Take this rifle, for it shoots straight," Birge Tatum said to the sheriff.

ing to light on Holt. The man in the black slouch hat strode toward him, then stopped before Young Buck. The man with the rifle shook Young Buck's hand. The man's nearness unnerved Holt and he glanced down at his watch, only to see his hand tremble. Relief washed over Holt when the man with the rifle turned and walked past the sheriff toward the women at the wagon.

"That," said Young Buck, "is Birge Tatum."

Holt watched as Tatum, the rifle still at his side, hugged each of his daughters and daughters-in-law, then his wife. He lingered in her arms, her tears falling on his shirt. With his free hand, he lifted her chin from his chest and kissed her softly on the lips, then broke her grasp. His wife started to sob and his daughters and daughters-in-law began to cry as Tatum turned about and marched toward the sheriff. As he passed the pine coffin, he removed his hat without pausing and flung it inside, his stride as steady as his unwavering eyes and his firm hands. He stopped in the middle of the blanket and lowered his head humbly before the sheriff.

"I am ready," he said.

The sheriff clenched his jaw, his lower lip trembling for an instant, then nodded.

Birge Tatum lifted the rifle to his chest and extended the weapon to the sheriff. "Together we hunted as boys and I know your aim is true. Take this rifle, for it shoots straight. Do with it what you must."

The sheriff's hand quivered as he accepted the weapon. He started to speak, then bit his lip and cleared his throat as he looked awkwardly at the rifle's blued metal.

Birge Tatum stepped to the sheriff and clasped him on the shoulder. "It is time," he said. "It is time." Birge Tatum began to unbutton his work shirt, then strip the cotton cloth from his torso. His bronzed chest rippled with muscles from years of honest work as he tossed the shirt to the deputy.

The lawman caught the shirt, but stood bewildered over what to do with it until one of Tatum's daughters rushed and snatched it from his hand. She gave the deputy a white shirt, boiled and starched and then ironed of even the slightest wrinkle. The young woman retreated to the wagon and gave Birge Tatum's work shirt to her mother, who crumpled it in her hands and held it against her cheek, inhaling her husband's aroma still upon the cloth, even as her tears began to cleanse it.

Uncertain what to do with the unsoiled white shirt, the deputy looked from the sheriff to the wagon before Birge Tatum stepped to him and tugged the shirt from his grip. "A man should die in a clean shirt," he said to the deputy as he slid his muscled arms into the sleeves, then buttoned the front and tucked the stiff shirttail into his britches.

Holt, his knees shaking, felt the hard gaze of Young Buck upon him and turned to answer the stare.

"All Choctaw have honor," Young Buck said, then snapped his head toward the condemned man.

When Birge Tatum finished straightening his clean shirt, he ran his fingers through his black hair and finally nodded to the sheriff. "I am ready to die." He moved to the center of the blanket spread over the ground.

The sheriff looked from Tatum to the rifle in his own hands, then shook his head. "Judge," he called and another Choctaw emerged from the circle of spectators.

The judge, his lips drawn tight and his face etched with the burden of having sentenced a good man to death, even if it was the law, stepped on the wool blanket beside the condemned. In his left hand the judge carried a lawbook. With his right hand he pulled his pocket watch from his vest pocket, noted the time, then studied the crowd. Every man strained to hear what the judge was about to say; even Tatum's womenfolk stopped crying. The hush that enveloped the courthouse grounds seemed to extend to the trees, where birds stopped singing and the leaves stopped rustling as the breeze seemed suddenly to expire. It was so still that Holt heard nothing except the pounding of his own heart, which seemed to lodge in his throat. Holt wanted to slip away and save his watch, but when he stepped backward, Young Buck watched him with narrowing eyes that seemed to read his very intentions. Knowing this was one bet he should never renege on, Holt swallowed hard, but his fear only lodged in his throat, where his heart seemed to be. Holt was glad when the judge finally spoke.

"It being four minutes after the noon hour on the day designated for the lawful execution of Birge

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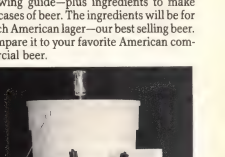

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"You will do me honor by helping me keep my word," Birge Tatum said to the sheriff.

Tatum, we are gathered under Choctaw law to carry out the court's decree for the crime of murder," the judge said, replacing the pocket watch in his vest, then removing his dark hat and holding it over his heart.

Birge Tatum stood straight and still as a statue, no measure of fear in the dwindling minutes of his life.

The judge took a deep breath. "Birge Tatum, after being tried according to Choctaw law and found guilty of the crime of murder by a jury of your own people in a legally constituted court of law, it is my duty to sentence you to death by a single bullet to the heart."

Birge Tatum nodded.

"Would you care to say anything before the decree of this court is carried out?"

Birge Tatum lifted his head to the sky. "I ask that my spirit be received in the custom of my people. Without honor, a Choctaw has no life, even when he walks upon the earth, drinks from the rivers, and breathes from the sky. Though I die a murderer, I also die a man of my word." Birge Tatum knelt upon the center of the blanket and held out his arms.

The judge nodded solemnly. "May God have mercy upon your soul," he said, replacing his hat and turning to the sheriff. "I have done my job and now it is time for you to do yours."

The sheriff grimaced. "We've been friends since we were boys. We've hunted together, eaten together, and drunk from the same cup. I just can't." His voice broke with emotion as he offered the rifle to his deputy. "You do it."

"No!" came the firm voice of Birge Tatum. "You will do me honor by helping me keep my word."

The sheriff's shoulders drooped and he lowered the rifle to his side. He pinched the bridge of his nose, then nodded. "If you wish." He turned to his deputy. "Blindfold him." Next the sheriff pointed to two of the men who had removed the coffin from the wagon. "Hold his arms, if you can."

The two men nodded and stepped to the blanket, grabbing Tatum's outstretched arms at the wrists while the deputy folded a white kerchief. The deputy stepped behind Tatum and covered the condemned man's eyes, tying the cloth in a knot behind his head. From the creek Birge Tatum's women set to wailing again, breaking the unnatural silence.

"Mark his heart," the sheriff ordered his deputy.

Squatting by the blanket, the deputy spat upon his forefinger and rubbed it in the dark soil. Then he dirtied the clean shirt with an *X* over Birge Tatum's left breast.

Tatum remained motionless and brave as the deputy straightened and stepped away from Birge Tatum. The sobs of the women provided an eerie music over the proceedings. Shad Holt shook his head, wishing he had never come to the execution. Not only had he lost his watch in a sure bet, but he had also lost his nerve. Birge Tatum was made of stronger stuff than he was.

"Hold him tight," the sheriff commanded the men affixed to his wrists. As the sheriff lifted Birge Tatum's rifle to his shoulder, the women screamed.

Holt saw the gun barrel quiver for a moment, then watched the sheriff press the rifle stock even harder against his shoulder. It steadied, then suddenly exploded. Holt jumped, but Young Buck beside him never flinched.

A black hole appeared instantly in the center of the mark on Birge Tatum's white shirt. His head collapsed as blood stained the shirt. He slumped forward and the two men holding his arms lowered him slowly to the ground, then released him when his face touched the blanket. By the creek, the women wailed louder still.

The judge stepped forward, pulling his watch from his vest pocket to announce the time that the decree of the court had been carried out.

For an instant, the deed appeared done, but then Birge Tatum began to twitch and writhe upon the blanket.

"He's not dead," somebody yelled.

The sheriff cried out in anguish.

The two men who had held his arms rolled him over and he began to thrash about.

"Shoot him again," yelled the deputy.

The bewildered sheriff lifted the rifle to his shoulder as Birge Tatum writhed in agony upon the blanket.

"Don't shoot," yelled the judge, leaping toward the sheriff and shoving the rifle barrel skyward just as it exploded in a cloud of gunpowder.

"What?" demanded the sheriff, wrestling the rifle from the judge's grip. "He's my friend. I gotta do something."

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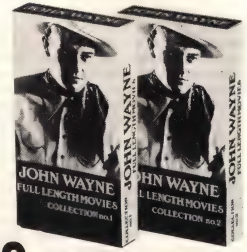

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Shad Holt felt his stomach churning. He had never seen an execution before.

"We can't," the judge cried in panic. "It'd be murder."

"What?" the sheriff bellowed.

Screaming and pulling their hair, the women ran from the wagon toward the wounded Tatum. The two other men who had helped carry the coffin intercepted them and pointed them back to the wagon.

"The execution decree," the judge hollered, "sentenced him to die by a single gunshot wound to the heart. A second bullet would be murder." The judge pointed to the lawbook in his hand. "It's the law."

The sheriff flung the rifle to the ground. "Somebody do something," he pleaded.

Shad Holt felt his stomach churning. He had never seen an execution before, much less a botched one. All around him, men stood in shock, their mouths agape, their eyes wide with the terror of their helplessness. Something had to be done, but what?

Suddenly, Young Buck bolted from the crowd and dived toward Tatum's squirming form. Hitting the ground on his knees, Young Buck jerked the blindfold from Birge Tatum's head, then wadded it up and shoved it into the condemned man's gaping, bloodied mouth. Young Buck pinched Tatum's nostrils so he could not breathe and the wounded man fought back, thrashing wildly.

"Hold him," Young Buck screamed.

The two Choctaws who had supported Tatum as he was shot fell to his thrashing arms and pinned them to the ground. The sheriff and the deputy jumped for his flailing legs, collapsing upon them, fighting his sudden strength.

Gradually Tatum's strength, like his life, drained away. One by one the sheriff, the deputy, and the two men on his arms released their grip, straightening to their knees and sighing at the injustice of a man so honorable dying so horribly. Only Young Buck kept his position, pinching Tatum's nostrils and covering his rag-stuffed mouth until he had smothered him.

The Tatum women sobbed and hugged each other, even more so when Young Buck stood up, his hands stained with the blood of Birge Tatum.

The judge knelt on the blanket beside the body and lowered his head to Tatum's, listening for breath from his nose. Lifting his head and straightening on his knees, the judge pulled his pocket watch from his pocket, looked at the time, then addressed the crowd. "Twelve twenty-one and justice, if not mercy, has been served. The earthly remains of Birge Tatum are hereby relinquished to his family."

The judge, sheriff, and deputy rose and backed away as the grieving women and two more men joined Young Buck and the two others beside Tatum's body. The women cleaned the dead Tatum's face, while his widow dabbed the work shirt in the bloody wound. The men straightened his legs and folded his arms across his chest, then moved the women aside so they could wrap him in the woolen blanket. His widow resisted, then fell to the ground at his head and kissed him upon the forehead before her daughters and daughters-in-law pulled her away. The men folded the blanket around him. Together the five men carried Tatum to the coffin as one of the women removed his slouch hat. The men lowered Tatum inside the coffin. Young Buck accepted the hat from the woman and placed it over Tatum's chest.

His eyes red and watery, the sheriff bent over the rifle he had discarded and picked it up, carrying it meekly to the coffin. As he approached the body, the others cleared a path for him. "I'm sorry, Birge—sorry I didn't aim better," he said, his head drooping and his voice cracking with emotion. He bent over the coffin and placed the rifle atop the blanket-shrouded body. When the sheriff straightened, Young Buck and the others who had put Birge Tatum in his coffin shook the lawman's hand. The sheriff said nothing, just stared, his jaw clenched.

Young Buck stepped to Birge Tatum's widow and hugged her, then moved to one of the other crying women and kissed her on the forehead. The four Choctaw men who had helped Young Buck comforted the widow, then moved to one of the younger women as the sheriff waved a couple spectators away from the coffin. The sheriff picked up the coffin lid and placed it atop the wooden box, then took a hammer and nails and began to seal Tatum inside.

Shad Holt tried to ease back through the spectators, but a couple of Choctaws blocked his path. Holt knew he would be forced to settle his debt. He steeled himself and waited as Young Buck comforted his woman.

Young Buck draped the watch like a necklace over the wooden cross on his father's grave.

When the sheriff finished hammering the lid onto the coffin, Young Buck strode toward Shad Holt.

Fear nibbled at Holt's gut as Young Buck approached.

The Choctaw stopped opposite Holt and lifted his hand for Holt to see the blood upon his palm. "This is the blood of a brave man, not a coward like you."

"So you won the watch," Holt managed.

Young Buck shook his head. "No, my father won the watch. He was a man of his word."

Holt fished the timepiece from his vest and began to unhook it from its chain.

"No," Young Buck said. "The chain goes with it."

Holt shook his head. "Wasn't part of the wager."

Young Buck planted his hands on his hips. "My life I bet on one man's word and you quibble over a chain."

Holt wilted under Young Buck's hard gaze, then offered him the watch and chain. "Take it."

"At the cemetery I will take it," he answered.

"I'm not going to the cemetery."

"Yes, you are," Young Buck said, his words coming out as a threat.

Several other Choctaw crowded around Holt, insinuating harm by their closeness if he did not accompany the funeral party to pay off his debt. He answered in defeat. "I am."

As men loaded the coffin in the wagon, Young Buck retreated and helped his mother in the back. She sat on the coffin, fighting tears but no longer sobbing. The crowd began to break up as men moved to their horses and wagons. Shad Holt looked around for Dan Wilborn, who had come to the execution with him and was one of the handful of white men who had witnessed the death of Birge Tatum. Wilborn, though, was nowhere to be found. Holt cursed beneath his breath and moved to his gray gelding. As he mounted, he had the feeling he was being followed by someone. He glanced over his shoulder and saw two Choctaw men eyeing him warily. They climbed into their saddles and aimed their horses for Holt's, no longer trying to disguise their intent.

Holt pointed his gelding toward the caravan that formed behind the wagon and plodded down the trail four miles to a small cemetery off the road. Holt counted thirty graves marked with rough wooden crosses or primitive stones and estimated as many more graves unmarked except for mounds of stones or slight depressions where the earth had settled. A mound of fresh dirt marked where Birge Tatum would be buried. The coffin had already been carried to the grave by the time Holt dismounted and moved to join the mourners and the curious. His two Choctaw shadows trailed him to the back edge of the crowd, where Holt wished to remain until he could pay his debt and escape. One of the Choctaws, though, said something and a path parted among the assembled men. The two motioned for Holt to move to the front.

As he advanced, he felt every pair of Choctaw eyes burning into him. He stopped not ten feet from the coffin. The service began immediately, with a Choctaw stepping forward and speaking of Birge Tatum and his death. Holt didn't listen; he just wanted to get away. After what seemed an interminable time, the men lowered the coffin into the ground, then volunteers from among the curious picked up shovels and began to fill the grave. With a dozen men assisting, the work went quickly and soon dirt was mounded over the coffin.

Young Buck moved to a new wooden cross leaning against an adjacent tombstone. He picked up the cross, carried it to the mound of dirt, and shoved it into the ground at the head of the grave. Then he took a shovel and pounded the marker, with Birge Tatum's name burnt into the crosspiece, into the earth. Young Buck handed the shovel to another man and approached Holt, his hand extended.

Holt nodded, unhooking his watch chain, then pulling the timepiece from his vest pocket. He looked at the watch a final moment, then dropped it into Young Buck's open palm.

"A trinket, no matter its worth," Young Buck said. He took the loose end of the chain and hooked it to the case bow, then marched behind the wooden cross and turned to face the crowd. "Here this will hang so all will know my father was a man of his word." He draped the watch like a necklace over the cross.

All around Holt, men nodded their heads.

"It is over," Young Buck announced.

Instantly, the men surged forward to extend their condolences to the family.

Glancing over his shoulder, Holt saw that the two who had followed him were gone. He used the moment to escape, slipping to his horse and mounting, then riding back to the road. He nudged his gelding into a trot and used the trees to screen himself from anyone who might be watching.

Holt cursed Birge Tatum, Young Buck, and the entire Choctaw race. What they called honor, he called stupidity. And his watch? As soon as everybody left, one of the Choctaws would slip back to steal and then sell it. They were no better than anybody else, just more sanctimonious.

As he rode back toward Moshulatubbe District Courthouse, Holt vowed to return to the cemetery before dusk to prove the Choctaws were as crooked as any breed of people.

Back at the courthouse, he found Dan Wilborn gnawing on an apple, but as soon as Wilborn saw him he turned his back. "Stay away from me," he said without explanation.

Holt scowled and rode on, leaving the road and making a wide swing through the woods, aiming to return to the cemetery. By taking his time, Holt stretched the trip out to more than an hour —plenty of time for the cemetery to have been abandoned and for a Choctaw to have returned to steal his watch.

As Holt neared the cemetery, he kept among the trees until he was certain the graveyard was vacant. Seeing no sign of activity, he slapped the reins against his gelding and urged it into a trot, all the time looking around to see if anyone was watching. He saw no one. Quickly, he was upon the cemetery, riding among the tombstones and wooden markers to the newest grave.

As he approached Tatum's grave, Holt saw the watch still suspended on the cross where Young Buck had left it. Holt laughed. He had lost his bet, yet retrieved his watch before any of the Choctaws thought it safe to return and steal it. He jumped from his horse, snatched the watch, slipped it in his vest pocket, then mounted quickly and galloped away before someone discovered him.

He laughed at how stupid the Choctaw were. There was seventy-five dollars for the taking on the cross and not a single Choctaw had beaten him to it.

When he was a couple miles beyond the cemetery, he eased the gelding to a walk and pulled the watch from his pocket. It had wound down, so he lifted the stem crown to rewind it. The watch clicked as it always did when he wound it, but the hands were frozen. He tried to set them to the approximate time, but they wouldn't move. He cursed at the watch and examined it to see if the Choctaw had damaged it so it would not work, but he found neither a new dent nor a scratch upon the watch or crystal. He cursed as he realized the time frozen upon its face.

It was a perpetual 12:21—the time Birge Tatum had died. ⊞

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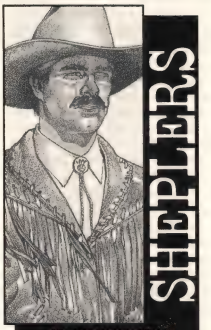

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JOSHUA'S DECISION

"Hello the shack!"

The echoing call came up from a stand of Colorado blue spruce that carpeted the steep mountain slope below the mine dump.

An old man sat on a boulder at the edge of the mine dump. Joshua's eyes and thoughts followed a hawk with black-tipped wings that drifted in slow circles high in the sky. The old man smoked his pipe while he watched the hawk and let the early morning sun warm his tired bones, as he

BY RAY DORR

did most mornings—when he wasn't tetched.

The mixture in the blackened pipe bowl was a few shreds of precious tobacco mixed with dried kinnikinnick leaves. A weathered mountain man had shown Joshua the Indian tobacco when he had first come to the Colorado Rockies. The mountain man was long dead now. Joshua knew he'd soon follow. He wasn't afraid of death, or sorry to discard his worn-out body. He sometimes got the tremors, however, at the notion that he'd end up in hell, where he wouldn't have a chance to make amends after he died—amends to Ida, and especially to Mattie.

Joshua reached to pull the collar of his threadbare mackinaw coat up around his scrawny neck. Winter had come early this year, bringing frigid nights. And already one light snow had fallen and melted, except on the north slopes of the peaks. Dynamite froze, even inside the shack that perched on the flat top of the mine dump. Nine sticks of it were now thawing inside a covered skillet on the cookstove. Joshua had been careful to make a low fire of slow-burning green aspen twigs so the brown tubes of nitroglycerin and sawdust wouldn't explode. Wouldn't do to blow up the shack. And it wouldn't do any good to put frozen dynamite in the holes he had star-drilled with a single-jack hammer in the face of his gold mine, deep inside the mountain.

Recently, that single-jack had been getting heavier, or the drill steel duller, or the stringy muscles in his arms weaker.

The adit to the mine tunnel was in a wall of fractured red granite at the back of the rock dump. A thin vein of white quartz in the granite had attracted his attention years ago, shortly after his temper had destroyed nearly everything he loved.

Joshua looked around at the shack he'd built of slab boards beside the entrance to the mine. Despite the cold, the old man didn't want to leave the boulder to go into the shack. The single room was confining. Not like a mine tunnel is confining—that's different. Mines are alive with the sounds of dripping water, creaking timbers, echoes, and distant voices—Tommyknockers, Welsh miners called the voices. Joshua liked to lose himself in hard work in the dark tunnel with only a single candle for light. He enjoyed talking aloud, even arguing with the Tommyknockers. But the shack was a dead thing of boards and tar paper that smelled of wood smoke, stale grease, and dirty clothes. Tommyknockers never came out of the mine to visit him in the shack. Joshua sometimes called to the little men as he tossed in his narrow bed on sleepless nights. He hoped they would come to bicker and argue, but they never did.

Joshua wasn't afraid of death, or sorry to discard his worn-out body.

Instead, two or three times a year visions came to him in the shack. He wouldn't mind the spells so much if they left him alone up here on the side of the mountain. But they seized control of his mind and body in the dark of the night. They sent him staggering off the side of Saint Peter's Dome and down a long canyon to his nephew's foothill ranch at the edge of Colorado Springs, where he made a fool of himself. How many times had he stormed about the hay fields beneath a heavenly field of stars, calling her name, shouting her name? Joshua remembered the latest spell and shook his head. That sort of shenanigan wasn't like him at all when he had his wits about him. It was embarrassing to wake up in a bedroom in his nephew's house after such a spell.

"Hello the shack!"

Joshua blinked. He squinted his eyes to see better in the early light. The old man's eyesight had been sharp once. A pair of wire-rimmed spectacles purchased from a Sears, Roebuck catalog helped with reading, capping sticks of dynamite, and such, but not with seeing things far away.

"Who's there?" he called.

"It's me, Uncle Joshua. Paul."

Joshua smiled. Paul was his favorite. The teenage boy always seemed to be in some kind of trouble at home. Maybe that was the reason Joshua favored him. And Paul was the only one of his nephew's sons who helped in the mine whenever he had a spare day from ranch work, which wasn't often. Actually, Joshua was the boy's great-uncle. Everyone called the old man Uncle Joshua—even folks who weren't his kin.

Joshua placed a hand on one hip, straightened up slowly, and stepped to the edge of the dump. "By golly, howdy there, Paul. Good to see you, boy. Shake a leg and get on up here."

A cowboy on a horse appeared among the trees below the dump. The horse's hooves clicked on the rocks, and it grunted as it humped up the steep slope to the flat where the old man stood. The cowboy had the fresh face of a youth. He had recently gained his full height—he was tall, like all the men in the family. He dismounted, dropped the reins. The

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horse stood as if tied to the ground.

The cowboy extended a hand. "Howdy, Uncle Joshua. You're looking pert for this early in the morning."

Joshua shook the offered hand; it was nearly as callused as his own. "Hello, Paul. You come visiting at just the right time. I tell you, we're about to hit pay dirt. Feel it in my bones. Another round or two of shots is all it'll take to reach the mother lode. This mine'll be richer'n the Independence or the Cresson or any of them fancy mines up in Cripple Creek."

The boy frowned, scuffed the toe of a boot in the gravel. "I'm running away from home, Uncle Joshua."

"Running away? Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing like that? You got a roof over your head, three squares a day, a hard-working pa, a loving ma, a whole passel of little brothers."

The boy set his jaw. "Too many little brothers," he said. "Me being the oldest, I work the hardest. And I never seem to do nothing right. According to Pa, at least." The dammed-up words spilled out. "It wasn't so bad when we were running cattle. Nobody bothered me when I rode the high country range during summers or worked in the hay fields at the home place. Pa spent most of his time at his fancy law office in town. Then, last week, he up and sold the herd and the summer range without even a howdy-do to nobody. He's planning to turn the hay fields into truck gardens. Said with the town growing the way it is, lettuce and radishes are worth more'n beef. I'm supposed to trail after a mule and a cultivator all day in clodhopper shoes. Up one row. Down the next. Me, a horseman, stumbling along in flat shoes, looking at the hind end of a mule. He wants to sell all the saddle horses—even Chica, here. Pa just wants to keep one buggy horse, the work team, and two mules."

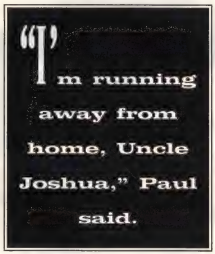
The old man walked over to run a hand down the glossy hair of the mare's shoulder. Chestnut. Joshua's favorite color. The horse turned her head to nuzzle Joshua.

"You broke Chica, didn't you, Paul?"

"Sure did. Raised her from a colt and broke her. She's half Morgan and half mustang. Chica's the best mountain horse I ever rode."

The old man thought of the advice he was about to give the boy—that he should go back home. He opened his mouth, the words ready on his tongue, then shut it. If only he had had enough sense to shut his mouth that night, years ago.

Instead, he said, "Come on into



the shack. I'll rustle us up some grub."

Inside the shack, Joshua lifted the skillet full of dynamite from the stove top and set it carefully on a paint-chipped table in the center of the small room. Heated dynamite is a mite unpredictable. He opened a door on the front of the sheet iron cookstove and tossed in a knot of pitch pine. Pungent pine smoke leaked out around a lid on top of the stove. The old man reached up and adjusted a damper on the rusty stovepipe. The finger of smoke disappeared.

"Running shy on supplies," he said. "Flapjacks all right for you?"

"Sure. Anything. I left home long before breakfast." The boy lifted the lid from a large crock that sat on the table next to the skillet of dynamite. "Whew! This sourdough you make from aspen bark smells like a whiskey bottle."

Joshua didn't explain that he seldom cooked the sourdough. Instead, he drank the liquid that formed in the crock.

"I'm all outta bacon drippings," he said. "The only grease I got is this bottle of castor oil." He poured oil into a hot frying pan. A heavy odor filled the small room.

"To tell the truth, Uncle Joshua," Paul said, "I'm really too mad to eat much. You don't need to cook but one or two of them flapjacks for me."

The old man shrugged. "Suit yourself," he said. "At my age, a little castor oil don't do no harm. There's some dried apples in that sack hanging from the rafters. Mice can't reach it up there. They'd pack the stove outta here if it wasn't screwed to the floor."

"Dried apples sound fine," Paul said.

After breakfast, Joshua said, "Let's move back outside. The morning is too pretty to waste by staying in here."

Paul nodded. "Suits me." The straight chair he sat in was held together with twisted baling wire. He pushed it back and stood.

The two stepped out the doorway of the shack, the old man tall and thin, bent back, shuffling with hesitant steps; the youth tall and slim, shoulders back, striding confidently in his high-heeled cowboy boots.

Joshua stopped to admire the mare. "Are you planning on taking her with you?"

Paul shook his head. "No, Chica belongs to Pa, just like everything

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else on the ranch does. I ain't taking nothing with me that belongs to him. I figure Pa'll come up here looking for me today. Tomorrow, at the latest. He can take Chica back to the ranch then. If you don't mind, Uncle Joshua, I'll leave my saddle and chaps and spurs with you. They belong to me."

"Won't you need your saddle to get a job? I never heard of anyone hiring a cowboy who didn't have his own outfit."

"I don't aim to hire out as a ranch hand this winter. For one thing, it's too late in the season. I'd be bumping up against older hands who're already riding the grubline trail until roundup next spring. Besides, cowboying's got no future, just sweating for a day's pay."

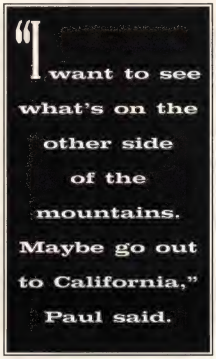
Paul gestured toward the surrounding peaks. "I want to see what's on the other side of the mountains, Uncle Joshua. These mountains and lots more. Maybe go out to California, where they say oranges grow on trees, and take me a look at the Pacific Ocean. That ocean's so big you can't see acrost it. Just think of that. I ain't looked acrost water no bigger'n a stock pond. Shoot fire, you can spit acrost a stock pond. I want some adventure in my life. I want to be an explorer. I'll go down into Old Mexico and search the jungles for lost cities where there's gold idols just waiting to be picked up.

"I sure don't want to be no farmer, tied down to some little dirt farm, praying for rain and hoping the grasshoppers don't come. Sweating for nickels and dimes the rest of my life. I want to be like you, Uncle Joshua. I want to be a prospector, with the chance of being rich."

"I'm a far spell from being rich, Paul."

"But you're close. You said another round of shots will open up the mother lode."

The old man went over to slump down on the boulder. For more than a minute he studied the broken rock beneath his worn brogans. He'd sworn to himself time and again that he'd never tell another person how to live their life. Did he have a right to counsel this youth? Maybe he could just ask a question or two to let the boy see his own way. Paul moved to sit on the boulder beside him.



Joshua took a deep breath. "How many prospectors have you talked to?"

"Lots. Up on the high range they've been digging prospect holes all over the place since gold was discovered in Cripple Creek."

"And how many of them told you they're about to strike pay dirt?"

The young cowboy frowned. "Well, I guess near every one of them said that. But Mr. Stratton struck it rich. He was nothing but a carpenter; now he's a millionaire."

Joshua said, "Stratton prospected every summer for nearly twenty years before he staked out the Independence mine. There's a thousand and more prospectors who hope to be like Stratton. They'll waste their lives looking for something they'll never find. You said you wanted to be like me. Be a prospector. By rights, I ain't no prospector. Haven't been for more'n twenty years. I'm a miner, anchored to this here mine. I haven't—"

The youth interrupted. "I always wondered about something, Uncle Joshua. Pa said you weren't always a miner. He said you and Grandpa built up the ranch. Is that true?"

"That was a long time ago." Joshua chuckled. He was relieved to get away from the decision of giving advice. "Your grandpa and me brought our families out from Ohio during the Pikes Peak Gold Rush in fifty-nine. We had a hankering to see new country, maybe find gold and be rich. Come to think on it, that's just the way you're thinking now, Paul."

The boy nodded in agreement.

Joshua paused. He wished he'd kept his mouth shut about leaving Ohio to follow a gold rush to a new land. Damned mouth, never knew when to stop jabbering. It's flapping now. No telling where it'll go.

"When we got here we seen there was more jaspers scrambling over these mountains looking for gold than there was gold. So we staked out a homestead along the crick and started growing vegetables to sell. That was before the war, and before the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad built Colorado Springs. There was still Injuns around here in them days. Mountain Utes and Cheyenne, mostly. Some Arapaho. They caused some shin-busting times during the war when all the soldier boys was Back East fighting. I remember one time, after the Sand Creek battle, some bucks near scared your Aunt Ida most to death when they come into the house and demanded she

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make biscuits for them. Believe you me, she whipped out a batch of them in jig time. They was gone by the time I came in from the fields. We was mighty lucky that day. Mighty lucky. The Injuns killed a passel of whites in them times."

Paul asked, "Aunt Ida was your wife, wasn't she?"

Joshua reached for the pipe in his shirt pocket. He stuck it in his mouth, sucked on it cold before he answered. "Yes. Ida was my wife." Ida's face came into focus among the cobwebs of his mind, young and beautiful. She was smiling confidently, like she did on the day they left their farm in Ohio to head into an unknown future in the Wild West. That day she sat close beside him on the wagon seat, as excited as he was for the new adventure. Suddenly, the face changed. It became wrinkled and drawn, framed by the pine boards of a coffin.

"When did you turn to raising cattle?"

A voice disturbed the old man's thoughts.

"Uncle Joshua?"

He found himself sitting on a boulder on the mine dump. Paul sat beside him. "What?" he said.

"You were telling me about coming to Colorado. When did you start raising cattle?"

"Cattle? Oh, that was after the war when them Johnny Rebs started driving longhorns up here from Texas. We bought a small herd and laid claim to the high country meadows. Most of the foothill and prairie land was open range then. Funny how things tend to go 'round in circles, though. Now your pa's gonna be growing vegetables, just like me and Amos done in fifty-nine."

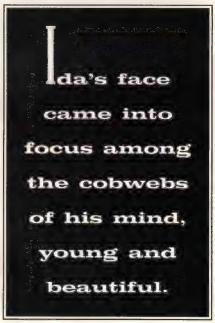
"I know Grandma died when Pa was born," Paul said, "and Grandpa Amos was killed by a bull. But how come Pa ended up owning all the ranch and you got nothin'? Ma told me you were a big-time cattleman once. She said folks even talked about electing you to be a state senator."

Memories flooded back to Joshua. Dark memories. They squeezed his heart.

The hawk suddenly swooped down out of sight behind a ridge.

Finally the old man spoke: "I got what I wanted. I just wanted to be left alone here in the mountains. We had an agreement, your grandpa and me. In fact, I was the one who made the offer. He'd take over all the work of running the ranch. I'd get enough grub and Giant powder to live here at the mine. After Amos was killed your pa took over the ranch, along with running his law business."

Paul snorted. "Pa sure hasn't kept you in enough grub for living high on the hog."



"I don't need much. Don't want much."

The pair sat in silence then, in the early morning sunshine.

The hawk flapped up from behind the ridge. Something hung from its claws. A field mouse probably. Maybe a ground squirrel. Joshua couldn't tell for certain. Both the hawk and whatever it carried were just a dark blur against the deep blue of the high-altitude sky. Joshua watched the hawk until it disappeared from sight. It must have a nest in one of the tall trees higher on the mountain.

He was conscious of Paul sitting silently beside him. He had hoped his responsibility for the boy's problems would somehow disappear as the hawk had disappeared—but it hadn't. Again Joshua chose to shy away from giving advice. He would ask another question and hope the boy would make his own decision.

"You got any money, Paul?"

"Four dollars."

"You can't go prospecting on four dollars."

"I aim to go up to Cripple Creek for the winter. I'll get me a job as a miner. They're making three dollars a day. Come next summer, I'll have a stake for prospecting. Maybe I'll go out to Nevada. I read in the *Gazette* that there's some new gold strikes out there."

Joshua shook his head slowly. What to do now? It was unlikely Paul could get a job in a mine in Cripple Creek. The few times the boy had helped Joshua didn't make him a miner. And the old man had heard that the gold camp was packed with experienced miners since the Silver Panic had closed all the silver mines in the state. What to do?

He asked, "Supposing you can't get a miner's job?"

"I gave that some thought. That's why I'm leaving my saddle with you. If I have to, I can sign on with some cow outfit riding roundup next spring. I'll make it through the winter in Cripple Creek some way. I can swamp out saloons if there ain't no other work."

"Your ma would die if she heard you was swamping out saloons. As I recall, she's a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union."

"Yeah," Paul said. "I hate the idea of leaving Ma. She'll feel bad

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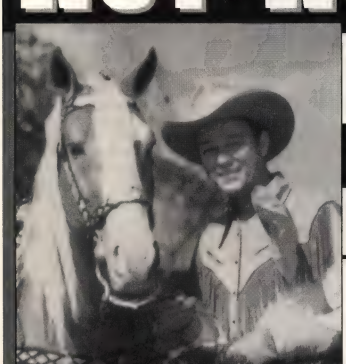

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because I'm gone. Her and you are the only ones who understand me. Pa sure won't care, except for losing a farmhand. I'm leaving, and I won't never come back. I'll be gone forever."

Gone forever—the same words Joshua had heard on a bleak winter night so many years ago.

"I'll be gone forever, Papa."

Mattie had come late in the married life of Joshua and Ida, long after they had given up hope for a child. She had been a beautiful baby who had grown to be a beautiful and caring child. The old man remembered early one spring—Mattie couldn't have been more than six or seven years old. She had ridden with him into the foothills that day to look for winter strays. Joshua hadn't spent much time looking for strays that day. Instead, he had enjoyed the company of his daughter in the fresh outdoors on the first warm day of spring. Mattie reined in the pinto she rode and scrambled down from the saddle. Joshua smiled when she stooped to pick a blue anemone—the first wildflower of the season to poke through the layer of matted brown leaves beneath a scrub oak bush. Mattie turned to him, held up the flower. "For Mama," she said. The flower was wilted by the time they returned to the ranch house.

As she grew older, Joshua seldom allowed her to be around the cowboys who rode for the ranch, and especially near the bunkhouse. "Don't hang around them cowboys," Joshua told Mattie. "A cowboy's nothing but a laborer on horseback. You deserve better'n that. You can marry any cattleman in Colorado, or one of them rich young fellers that come out from the East."

By the time Mattie was eighteen years old, the ranch had prospered. Joshua and his brother had

"Don't hang around them cowboys," Joshua told Mattie. "You deserve better'n that."

each built a large, two-story Victorian house on the home place. Joshua had become an officer in the state cattlemen's association, where he was a leader in the fight to keep sheepmen from invading Colorado cattle ranges. Because of his fiery speeches, fellow cattlemen encouraged him to become active in politics. The prospect of being an important man in the new state appealed to him. His hair was turning gray now. "Colorado will be a state soon," he said one day to Ida and Mattie with a grin. "Do you think I look distinguished enough to be a state senator?"

A January blizzard swept down the Front Range of the Rockies the night Joshua's world fell apart. He was in the front parlor, bent over a ledger at his rolltop desk, when Mattie appeared in the darkened doorway. Wind rattled the windows, stirred the window shades and the floor-length tapestry curtains. It flickered the yellow flame in the coal oil lamp that illuminated the corner of the room where Joshua sat. Mattie's movement into the doorway caught his attention.

"Mattie, come in," Joshua said.

Once again he admired the beauty of his daughter. Any father would be proud to have a daughter as comely as Mattie. Tall. Graceful. A woman now.

She frowned, appeared uncertain.

"I don't want to bother you, Papa," she said.

Joshua turned up the wick on the lamp. "You never bother me, Mattie."

She compressed her lips, twisted a lace handkerchief in her hands. "I hope not, Papa. I want you to know I love you. You and Mama."

A disturbing warning pierced Joshua's thoughts. He walked across the room to his daughter and put a protective arm around her shoulder. "I love you, too, darling." He squeezed her shoulder. "Now, what's your problem?"

"I . . . I want to get married."

Joshua smiled. He stepped around to look into his daughter's eyes. "There's nothing wrong with getting married. Although you know your ma and me was thinking some of sending you Back East to college before you settled down. But that don't matter. Who's the young man that's gonna steal you away from me? Is it Chet Anderson's boy? Seems to me he's come visiting right regular lately."

Mattie buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

Her behavior alarmed him. Situations a father should never imagine crept into his thoughts.

Joshua stepped back. "Mattie, you're not wanting to marry a cowboy, or one of them sheepherders, are you? Not a sheepherder." A shade of harshness shadowed his words. "I'd be the laughingstock of the state if you done a fool thing like that."

Mattie shook her head while her shoulders trembled with the sobs. Ida stepped into the doorway and wrapped her arms around her daughter.

"Now, you just calm down, Joshua," Ida said. "You know

your temper. You're always flying off the handle, then you're sorry afterward."

Joshua started to breathe deeply through his nose. Tiny sparks appeared at the backs of his eyes. If there was one thing he couldn't tolerate, it was not getting an answer to a question. He began to think that he might not want to know the answer.

"Will one of you please tell me what's going on!" his voice growled in command.

Ida scowled at him. "She's in a family way, Joshua."

Joshua glared at the pair of women in disbelief. "I can't believe that," he said. "Not in this family. Not my daughter. Not the daughter of a future senator!"

He scooped the ledger from the desk and hurled it against a far wall.

"Hell's fire! This wipes out my chance of being a senator."

Joshua turned back to glare at the two women. "Who's the boy? I'll kill him!"

Ida straightened her shoulders and faced her husband defiantly. "He's a married man. We'll never tell you his name. Mattie and I thought the best solution for her would be to marry that young cowboy who came up from Arizona last fall. What's his name? Tom. Tom something-or-other. He's been making eyes at Mattie ever since he came to work for you."

"A married man?" Joshua jabbed a forefinger at Mattie. "My daughter and a married man?" He swung the accusing finger toward Ida. "And you, my wife, saying you won't tell your husband the name of the sheepherder who done this?"

"Good-bye, Uncle Joshua. I'm leaving now."

"It wasn't one of your hated sheepmen," Ida said.

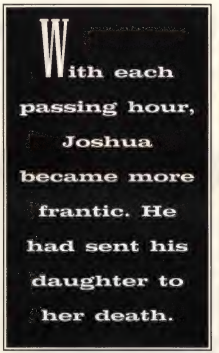
"Well, I can't think of a worse name to call a man!" Joshua shouted. "Not in front of women, nohow!"

Joshua knew he had completely lost control of his temper. He knew he should stop shouting, go out to the barn until his rage had a chance to simmer down. He squinted his eyes as he shook his finger at his daughter.

"You're no daughter of mine, Mattie. Not from this day on."

Mattie raised her eyes. They brimmed with tears. "Papa—no!"

"Joshua, stop talking this nonsense," Ida said.



"It's not nonsense. I mean it! I want this girl outta my house."

"If I leave, I'll be gone forever, Papa."

"Go!" he commanded.

With a cry, Mattie tore herself from her mother's arms. Her running footsteps echoed through the house. The kitchen door slammed against an outside wall. The wind banged it shut, then whipped it open again. Cold air swept into the parlor.

"Joshua, that child will die out in this storm. She hasn't even got a wrap." Ida's voice snapped like the crack of a whip.

Rage drained out of Joshua as quickly as it had come. He gaped at his wife, horrified. "I'll catch her," he said. "I'll tell her I'm sorry." He rushed past Ida toward the kitchen door.

Joshua hurried across the ranch yard, through driving snow, to his brother's house. Amos shook his head—Mattie wasn't there. Joshua ran to the bunkhouse. He ordered the hands out to search the barns. A rider was sent on horseback to search the road toward town. Joshua borrowed a hat and sheepskin coat from one of the hands. He hadn't stopped for his own hat and coat before following Mattie out into the storm.

Joshua, Amos, and the men searched in ever-widening circles from the ranch headquarters while wind and snow tore at their clothes, numbed their hands and feet, formed icicles on their beards. From time to time, a man returned to Joshua's house to warm up in front of the kitchen coal stove and drink a mug of strong coffee that Ida brewed while she waited. They saddled horses before returning to the fields and surrounding rangeland. Now they looked for both Mattie and Joshua.

Joshua never halted his search as the storm increased in intensity. He waded through snow, sometimes in drifts to his waist. His strong voice became hoarse as he called against the scream of the blizzard. With each passing hour he became more frantic. He had sent his daughter to her death. For what? His own vanity? She had come to him for help and he had rejected her.

Joshua learned later that Amos had found him that night, far up the creek bottom. He was more dead than alive from the cold. Even when Amos had called to him, ridden up beside him and touched his shoulder, Joshua had struggled ahead, unaware of his brother. Amos had climbed off the

horse, grabbed hold of Joshua, hoisted him into the saddle, taken him back to the house.

One of the cowhands found Mattie the next day in the middle of the main hay fields. Only one arm and the girl's long chestnut-colored hair lay exposed in the snow.

Ida stopped living that day, when Mattie's frozen body was brought back to the ranch house in the back of a farm wagon. She died six months later.

Joshua sat on the boulder on the edge of the mine dump. He suffered over a decision: Should he break the pledge he had made to himself the day Ida's coffin was lowered into a grave next to Mattie's final resting place? The pledge was etched deeply in his mind, reinforced countless times by bouts of self-recrimination: Don't never tell nobody they done wrong.

On the other hand, a boy Paul's age, all alone in a mining camp—was heading for a peck of trouble. Oh, sure, Paul had had some hassles with his pa. But what boy worth his salt didn't stand up to his pa from time to time? And what about Paul's ma? She was a gentle soul. How many nights would she lie awake wondering where her eldest son was at that moment? Joshua knew that tortured feeling of lying awake, pondering.

Joshua reached a decision. It was the right decision, he decided, especially for both Paul and his ma. He would tell the boy to go home, stay with his family until he grew older. Most of all, he shouldn't break his ma's heart, as he surely would do if he ran away. The old man felt relieved and good about his decision. Maybe, in a small way, it would make up for the terrible thing he had done so long ago. Maybe his advice to the boy would count in his favor after he died and allow him to squeeze through the Pearly Gates so he could again be with Ida and Mattie.

"Paul," Joshua said. He looked around the mine dump. It was empty, except for himself and the mare. The saddle had been removed from the horse and was propped against the side of the shack.

The old man stood and squinted toward a trail that led to a stage road between Colorado Springs and Cripple Creek. He thought he saw a figure on the trail, far across the mountainside.

"Paul, wait!"

He tried to shout, but the shout came out as a raspy croak.

For a moment, Joshua felt a wave of panic surge into his breast. Then his shoulders sagged. The tall, lean old man standing on the edge of the mountain mine dump raised a hand that quivered.

"Good-bye, Paul," he said. He spoke barely above a whisper. "Have a good life, boy." ⊠

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Two Women of the Prairie

BY STEVEN UTLEY

It never occurred to her to complain. Things were the way they were. When her daughter died, her son-in-law's familial obligations ended, and he was free to seek another wife. She was free to choose between getting by as well as she could for as long as she could, with no living relatives to help her, and in the face of the fact that no one who was not a relative owed her a thing, or else staying behind and waiting to die when the band moved on.

Her will to live proved stronger than her pride. She became a scavenger, subsisting on others' garbage. She had no lodge skins or poles, and no animals to haul them if she did; she fashioned for herself a rude shelter of rags

She bore being dead as she bore everything else, with a scavenger's patience.

and sticks, which she carried in a bundle on her back when the band traveled.

"Old woman! old woman!" the children might call, and make faces, and dash away laughing, delighted at their own cleverness. No one else paid any attention to her unless it was strictly necessary. "Get out of the way, old woman," a man might say as he came by on his pony—unless, of course, the man happened to be her former son-in-law, in which case he would ignore her as steadfastly as he had from the moment of his marriage to her daughter. It was considered bad form to speak to one's mother-in-law —worse if she was dead, too. She bore being dead, being ignored, being insulted, as she bore everything else, with a scavenger's patience.

It was only late at night, as she lay in her miserable shelter, that she sometimes permitted herself to dwell upon the series of calamities that had befallen her. She would stroke one mutilated hand with the other and count the missing finger knuckles, each lopped off in token of mourning for a dead relative. Husband, brothers, sons, daughter. She would recall what it had been to have ten fully functioning fingers, and then what it had been to be young, smooth-skinned, pretty. She had been all of those things. More than one young man, affecting nonchalance as he passed playing his flute, had singled her out in a group of marriageable maidens and tried to flirt with her, only to have his composure wrecked by girlish taunts and laughter. One man had finally paid her father many horses for her; no one could have been more impressed by her value than she herself was.

Late one night, as she thought about those horses, the will to live finally did gutter in her, like a flame in a draft. She crawled out of her shelter and walked away from the sleeping camp. She walked in no particular direction and never bothered to look back, for she knew that no one behind her cared. She walked with the wind, and it urged her on her way. She walked for hours, strangely tireless, as though she had saved up strength over the years for this very occasion. The stars passed overhead, the moon fell slowly, the eastern sky lightened. At last the hours and the miles told on her. She was stiff and in pain, and the chill had settled through her withered flesh, into her bones. She was thirsty and hungry, too. Still, it never occurred to her to complain.

In the dream, if it was a dream, if she had actually been asleep in bed and dreaming and not lying awake in bed and *thinking*, the prairie spread away from Rebecca to a circle of horizon. She was the only thing moving in that grassy expanse. She was moving at a dead run, clawing at the air with her hands as though she could grab it and pull it past and increase her speed by that much. She had shed her clothes, and her loosened hair streamed behind her. Her eyes were wide. She had her mouth open, screaming. She looked like a madwoman.

She started, and the vision vanished. Embers glowed in the hearth, casting barely enough light upon the sod hut's walls and ceiling to show her they were there. *So I have been dreaming,* she thought, and turned on her half of the rough bed toward her husband's vacant half. Not seeing him there had begun to seem normal. It had been strange at first—as strange as seeing him there had been after the wedding. One adjusted, so that each strange new thing became a familiar old thing. Six weeks earlier, she had watched her husband ride off on the one horse, leading the one mule, and heard him promise to return within a fortnight. Since then, she had felt herself tugged in several directions at once by the hope that he still would come back; the fear, now passed into expectation, that he might not, ever; and the deepening suspicion that he had never intended to do so. He had taken the one firearm and most of the tools.

She rose from the bed and moved to the window. There was no glass, only a greasy cloth covering; she drew it back and looked hatefully out at the prairie. Dark clouds lay low on the horizon, and the air was cool and heavy with moisture.

As she had done every morning since her husband's departure, she took inventory of foodstuffs: so much corn meal left, so much coffee, syrup, beans. She needed fresh water. She shouldered the yoke with the bucket suspended from either end and trudged toward the creek bottom, half a mile away. Near the low mound of the sod hut, the path took her by a

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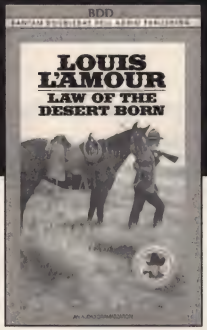

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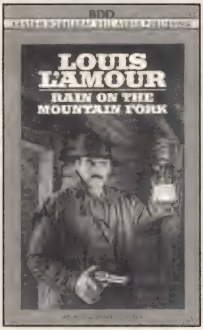

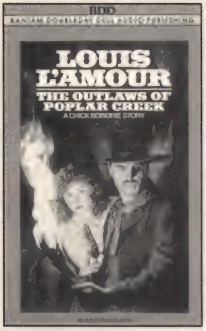

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Lightning flashed on the horizon, and thunder rolled across the prairie.

narrow circular pit. Dirt lay in a heap next to the pit, and a shovel had been left stuck blade-deep into the heap. *You were a brute and a wretched rascal,* she told her absent husband, *but the least you might have done was get that well dug before you up and rode off.*

Then she told herself, as she had told herself many times during the past six weeks, *I need to bring that shovel inside.*

The storm was coming fast. Something else, coming more slowly, caught her eye as she returned from the creek bed. She took the water buckets in to that part of the room she reserved as the kitchen, then stepped back outside.

A speck moved on the prairie. She watched it for a full minute before recognizing it as a person, and then her first thought was that it was her husband. That whoever was coming was coming on foot did not register at once. She took one more step away from the door, stood almost perfectly motionless, and watched for a very long time. No, not her husband, but still, a person, someone, another human being. Yes, it was. Yes. She had not seen a human being other than her husband in seven months. Lord God in heaven, *yes.* She waved and hallooed. The wind seemed to snatch the sound right out of her mouth, and when she started to run, waving both arms, it resisted her solidly. Forty yards from the hut, she had to stop. Bent forward, hands on knees, panting, she squinted against the wind, trying to see.

And at last she saw that it was a woman, an old woman, an old Indian woman, at that—thin, dirty, tired-looking. The old woman came within yards of Rebecca before appearing to notice her. Then she stopped abruptly, drew a frayed, filthy blanket more tightly about her shoulders, and just looked at her. Rebecca had no idea of what to expect. She had seen few Indians since coming here, and those few had been distant figures on horseback, keeping their distance, going well around the homestead.

Lightning flashed on the horizon, and thunder rolled across the prairie. Black clouds were approaching very fast. Rebecca cleared her throat nervously and said, "You had better get back to where you belong." She pointed at the advancing clouds. "There's a bad storm coming."

The old woman's blanket slipped off one shoulder, exposing a ragged dress, but still she did not move, speak, or look away.

"Best you find some shelter for yourself," Rebecca said, taking a step away. The old woman did not move. The black clouds did. The light faded as quickly and definitely as though a mourning veil had been drawn across the world, and Rebecca was suddenly very cold. An icy bead of rain struck her with stinging force just below her left eye. She took five more steps in the direction of the hut and stopped to look back. The old woman swayed slightly, took a single step after her, and then the wind bent her over until she was on her hands and knees.

Rebecca hesitated, ran back to her, leaned over her. She was staring at the patch of ground framed by her hands, moaning—or chanting, Rebecca could not tell which. The old woman looked up only when Rebecca said, in exasperation, "Then come on!" and made a frantic gesture for her to follow. "Come on, come on. Into the soddy!" Curiosity, or perhaps it was only perplexity, suffused the seamed dark face. Encouraged, Rebecca grabbed one greasy sleeve of her dress and tugged her to her feet. She weighed less than her blanket. She weighed nothing at all. The wind seemed to propel them across the ground to the hut. The old woman balked at the door, but she was small and weak. Rebecca, of big-boned European stock, practically carried her in under her arm and deposited her by the hearth. Hail struck the door like a musket volley as she closed it.

She secured the cloth over the window to keep out the draft, then moved to the center of the room and from there to the back wall and around until she arrived at the hearth, opposite her guest. Neither she nor the old woman took eyes off each other as she made the circuit.

What have I done? Rebecca asked herself, but she knew. She said, "I could not leave you out there to die."

It required a major effort of will to look away long enough to determine the state of the fire. She took some dried dung from the pile on her side of the hearth and pushed it into the flames. The old woman sat on the dirt floor with her knees drawn up under her chin. Her bare feet were so dirty they were

Back home, Garvey Morris would never have dared to do what he had done to her.

black. She relaxed by degrees, settled in place, rested her head and shoulder against the wall, but stayed watchful. Finally, because Rebecca did not know what else to do, she made coffee. "I guess you would like some breakfast," she said, "and I guess I have to give it to you." She realized that she would have to turn her back on the old woman to take the two tin cups off their pegs—sticks her husband had driven into the wall at shoulder height. The nape of her neck tingled as she did it.

The old woman was plainly startled when offered a cup of hot black liquid. She would not accept the cup, though the aromatic steam from it obviously interested her. Rebecca carefully set the cup on the floor before her and drew back.

"I guess you do not know about coffee," she said. Or was it the cup? Did Indians drink like beasts?

She set her three-legged skillet on the fire to heat and mixed up some corn cakes. The old woman's nostrils twitched as they cooked. Rebecca became aware of another smell in the close atmosphere of the hut. She was no stranger to stench, but she felt herself overwhelmed by the other's commingled odor of unwashed body, rancid grease, and the Lord only knew what else. She poured a little water into a metal basin and got a brush and a precious bit of soap. She set these before the old woman, who regarded them incuriously and then watched Rebecca roll up her sleeves.

"You have to wash," Rebecca said, "if you expect to stay inside." She made a scrubbing motion along her own forearm. "Wash." She reached over and touched the back of the old woman's hand. The old woman did not seem to mind. She did not seem to care. Rebecca slid her fingers under the palm, gently took grip, and drew the hand toward herself. It was then that she saw the nubs of bone protruding from the truncated fingers. She recoiled with a little cry. "What *happened* to you?"

The question went unanswered, unacknowledged. Rebecca made herself reach for the hand again. The old woman let her take it. Rebecca said, "We'll tend to it in a minute," splashed a little water on the hand, and carefully soaped it. She tried not to touch the bony stubs or to think about them. She used the brush gently, as if she were bathing a baby—

Not here, not his. . . .

She clamped her teeth together and went on with her scrubbing. The old woman suffered first the hand to be washed, then part of the wrist, then the other hand. Rebecca sat back on her haunches, unsure how to proceed. *Well,* she told herself, *it's a beginning,* and set the brush and the basin aside for the time being.

When the corn cakes were cooked, she put half of them on a plate, poured on a little sweet syrup, and set the plate on the floor before the old woman, next to the untouched cup of coffee. She took her own food at the rickety table. The old woman ate ravenously, licked crumbs off the sticky plate, tried to pick up a particle of bread that had fallen on the floor. It resisted her best efforts to grab it between thumb and forefinger. At last she moistened a bony stub with her tongue, daubed at the crumb and got it, and—

Rebecca quickly turned her head. When she dared to look again, the old woman was holding the tin cup with both hands, sniffing its contents. She took a cautious sip, then noisily sucked the coffee out. Her satisfaction was evident in the grin she gave the bottom of the cup.

"It's better drunk hot," Rebecca said. "Back home sometimes we put sugar in it, when we had sugar. Back home—"

Back home, there were no Indians anymore, and no howling wind that blew day and night, and no sod hut with dirt floor, walls, ceiling, grit always sifting down, mice always getting in. Back home, there were family and neighbors and community, and Garvey Morris would never have dared to do what he had done, which was to abandon her—run off and *abandon* her.

"Have you got a name?" Rebecca patted herself above her heart. "I'm Mrs. Morris." *And God help me.* "Mrs. Rebecca Morris. *Ruhbeh-ka.* I came out here with my husband last year." *And I hate it.*

And as soon as I told him. . . .

The pain of betrayal almost bent her double on her stool. *He ran off,* she told her unborn child, *and left us here to die by ourselves.*

The old woman held up the cup. Rebecca sat up, brushed away something at the corner of her eye that had threatened to become a tear, smoothed the front of her dress. She moved to the hearth and boiled more coffee. The storm

gave no sign of letting up. After a while, the old woman closed her eyes. Rebecca watched her until she was convinced that the old woman had fallen asleep, then took down her Bible and read to herself by candlelight.

The storm had abated when the old woman awoke. She experienced a moment's utter bewilderment before it came back to her that she was in the hole in the ground with the white woman. She had never seen a white person before, though she had heard many stories about how strange they were. Her husband had once met some, and her brothers. She stroked one mutilated hand with the other and counted the missing finger knuckles, lopped off in token of mourning. She had been young, smooth-skinned, pretty.

The following morning, Rebecca awoke to find the old woman lying before the hearth, fully stretched out, hands at her sides, as if she had known she would die during the night.

Rebecca spent the day digging a grave on the rise behind the sod hut. It was hard, dirty work. The earth was soft and wet and stuck to the shovel, clung to her feet, dragged at her. It was as though the prairie was trying to suck her under. On three separate occasions she simply stopped digging, squatted in the mud, and cried like a child. When the job was finished, however, she considered the grave she had scooped out to be a perfectly acceptable one for any Christian and quite an excellent one for any heathen. She placed the old woman in the ground, washed her hands thoroughly, and brought out the Bible.

She read aloud from it over the grave: "Hear my prayer, O Lord," and she raised her voice so that the Lord would be sure to hear her above the moan of the wind, "and let my cry come unto Thee. Hide not Thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline Thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness. I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top." She closed the book, cleared her throat softly, and said, "Hundred and second Psalm, verses one through seven."

She covered the old woman carefully. She cleaned the shovel when she finished and took it inside. The wind blew and blew.

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by
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On Patrol

The night was a clear blue-gray with stars scattered between black clouds. Overhead, the moon hung in the sky like a great luminous rock so the campsite was alternately dark or bathed in a silvery light. Lt. Garrett Lyons moved in and out of the very edge of sleep. Half immersed in his dream of an ace high flush, he rolled uneasily on the ground, bumping against an aspen tree. The jarring roused him. Cold air snaked down the collar of his jacket, then coiled around his arms and chest. Mumbling a word learned when he had first joined the cavalry, Lyons rose slowly and checked the rest of his patrol. The men were still wrapped in blankets up to their ears, with their caps tipped forward covering their faces.

Lieutenant Lyons was not a betting man. Betting men eyed fast ponies or how many peanuts in a jar. Lyons was a gambler, a thinker, a man who usually took premonitions in stride. Only this one had ridden with him since he had left Fort Fettermann.

Now, here, where the forests speak and the

ILLUSTRATION BY CLINT HANSEN

Lyons groped for his Springfield while his gray eyes searched the perimeter of the camp.

dead talk at night, it raised a nagging voice again.

Leaning against the aspen he blew cautiously on his fingers, working the stiffness out of the joints, his ears sifting the familiar night sounds. A gust of wind rustling the grass, bringing with it the smell of a coming storm. An owl's mournful cry, followed by the whisper of leathery wings as it stroked the air.

The snap of a cottonwood branch.

For an instant Lyons stood, motionless. Then, dropping slowly to one knee, he groped for his Springfield while his gray eyes searched the perimeter of the camp. The flutter of movement was so slight, the rustle of grass so faint, he almost missed it.

Suddenly, a figure emerged amid the rocks and a hand grabbed his rifle. In a quick fluid movement, Lyons slid his Colt up through the edge of his jacket, thumbed back the hammer, and pointed the barrel toward the figure.

"Not sleeping, *mon ami?*" The voice at his ear was barely more than a whisper.

"Damn." Lyons breathed in deeply once, then exhaled. "This is no time for your jokes."

Otwah squatted next to him, forearms resting on his knees, long gray hair hanging loose. The scout laughed, then showed his friend a small leather pouch.

Lyons turned the parfleche over in his hand, eyeing the familiar pattern of beaded triangles. He appeared calm, but a knot of concern twisted his stomach. "This looks like Sioux."

"This, *mon frere,* is a way out of your trouble."

Gen. J. Barton Gebhardt's words had ridden with Lyons since the men had left Fort Fettermann:

"A routine patrol, Lieutenant—shouldn't be more than a few days. You'll be back for our poker game. Report on any Indian activity. And, Lyons, keep out of trouble." The general used his best Moses-handing-out-the-word voice, staring at him full face with those deep brown eyes flecked with gold. The old man stroked his long chestnut beard, sipped at his whiskey, then added as an afterthought, "Don't forget the mail and my cigars."

This patrol had never been routine. Not from day one, when a trooper had broken his leg, then another had come down with fever. Lyons had lost two additional men as escort back to the fort. Left with a sergeant and three recruits, he made the best of it. After all, the army was his job; this patrol, his assignment. After twelve years he knew when and how to cut corners.

It was afternoon when he first noted the signs—pony tracks, signal smoke—indicating movement of a large tribe of Indians. Lyons changed their route, riding north toward Surrey Wells. When they arrived, the ferry and station were smoldering ruins. The only survivors were a badly wounded stage driver and a passenger who had escaped the raid because he had been using the privy.

Otwah rode up at dusk. "*Avait un long temp,* Lyons. You wintered fat."

Lyons felt like a man who had just drawn a pair of aces.

Frank "Otwah" LeBeau was General Gebhardt's personal scout, and a legend in the 4th Cavalry. Son of a French father and Potawatomie mother, it was rumored he could track a swarm of bees in a snowstorm. Otwah's arrival, wearing his hand-tooled Mexican boots and a ragged deerskin jacket, always signaled the beginning of a new Gebhardt campaign.

At dawn Lyons led the patrol on a wide sweep east, then turned south. Otwah remembered a shallow crossing of the Powder River near the ruins of Old Fort Reno. With hard riding and luck, Lyons figured they could make the fort by nightfall.

That had been two days ago.

Winter does not die easy on the plains. A fine mist, remnant of an earlier storm, had settled over the trail, making visibility spotty, at best. A thin blanket of snow still clung to patches of ground, so any movement of man or beast became slow and treacherous.

Yesterday they passed Sage Mesa, and Lyons began to breathe easier. He ignored the men's we've-been-dodging-hostiles-forever looks. Even when they reached Old Fort Reno and discovered it had become an Indian burial ground, Lyons figured his luck was still holding.

"*Ce n'est pas une probleme.*" Otwah shrugged. "We cross tomorrow."

They made camp near an outcropping of boulders that formed a natural shelter. It was a good position, considering the haste in which it was made. It was near dawn when Otwah discovered the Cheyenne camp at the river crossing. It was a small camp. Lyons counted no more than five tepees

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scattered amid the cottonwoods along the bank.

The day was spent in nervous exhaustion. The men charcoaled their faces around the eyes, and with their muddy uniforms, settled into the landscape. They chewed dried meat cold, chasing it with water from their canteens. Horses were picketed close and fed by hand from corn in their saddlebags. All the while, masses of dark clouds formed and reformed in the sky between intermittent showers. It was an uneasy peace.

Trailing Otwah was like chasing a ghost through the woods. Lyons held his rifle easy, keeping his tall, lean body close to the ground. Moonlight is deceptive. The banks of the Lower Powder are fringed with towering box elder and cottonwood, along with dense thickets of brush. Lyons tested each step as he moved up the crest of a low ridge.

Otwah touched Lyons's shoulder and pointed at a freshly killed deer near a tepee and a newly strangled puppy hanging nearby.

"My friend has been sleeping? He has not heard? The Oglala have a new shaman, not like the others—one with powerful medicine. Many tribes are listening. Wolf Robe and his Sioux visitors will eat, talk a long time."

A gust of wind stirred the grass and Lyons felt the skin prickle along the back of his neck. He remembered a recent memo from the War Department. No one at the fort had given the paper more than a passing glance. It contained the usual government excuses for sending less ammunition, fewer men and supplies, as well as a rumor that the Oglala Sioux had a new war chief. That and a new shaman made a potent combination.

"So Wolf Robe isn't here for a burial. A pity. How many Sioux?"

"The Oglala have a new shaman—one with powerful medicine. Many tribes are listening," Otwah said.

The wind shifted, bringing with it the sound and smell of the Cheyenne camp. A silvery mist gave it a surreal appearance. Lyons angled his body to get a better view, finally spotting faint wisps of white smoke drifting from one of the tepees. He closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them again, he saw two figures emerge from a tent.

"Oglala." Lyons spoke in a soft whisper, his lips barely moving. "Sioux and Cheyenne don't run together. Besides, Wolf Robe's Cheyenne. They're reservation Indians."

Otwah gestured.

Lyons raised an eyebrow.

"The rest are camped downstream near the big rock at the bend." Otwah sniffed the air. The sky had become dark, with no detail of clouds—just a solid blackness. "There will be more rain coming, soon. Everyone will stay inside, talk, eat."

"Don't suppose we could wait them out?"

Otwah's expression was blank. "You feel that lucky, *mon ami?*"

The two men exchanged quick, wordless glances. Lyons rubbed his chin thoughtfully, finally shaking his head. Otwah was right. The dead spirits of Old Fort Reno could not hide them forever. He thought of the men waiting—the recruits on their first patrol, the two civilians.

"Look, there, on the edge of those cottonwoods." Otwah pointed toward the path near a grassy hollow. It paralleled the Cheyenne camp, curving sharply through thick brush toward the river. "Listen for three owl hoots, count to ten. Walk your horses to the river, cross, then head north past Sage Mesa. After that, it will be easy."

Lyons could barely see the trail. "When do *we* start?"

"*Nous?*" Otwah smiled. "No, *mon ami,* I stay. There is more to learn, and I look more Cheyenne than you."

"I've already lost two days and probably a good poker game."

"Better than your scalp."

The night was alive with faint whispers of sound. The men sat quietly in the ruins of Old Fort Reno, each following his own thoughts. Exhaustion etched deep lines under their eyes and the damp seeped into their clothes.

Sergeant Jonas crouched next to a bush, shaking pebbles in his hand like dice, trying to stay calm. It had been only a few minutes, but it seemed an eternity since Lieutenant Lyons had disappeared with that Indian. What mattered now was his enlistment. In a week it would be over, and the sergeant had plans. There was gold, plenty of it, all over these hills. During the last year he'd heard the stories, seen the ore. Whatever the cost, he was getting back to Fort Fettermann.

Jonas moved quietly through the camp. With his Kentucky twang roughened by years of bawling orders at green recruits, he leaned over each man and hissed, "Up, up, all of you."

Troopers Caruso and White felt

900 MHz breakthrough!

New technology launches wireless speaker revolution...

Recoton develops breakthrough technology which transmits stereo sound through walls, ceilings and floors up to 150 feet.

Breakthrough wireless speaker design blankets your home with music.

By Charles Anton

If you had to name just one new product "the most innovative of the year," what would you choose? Well, at the recent *International Consumer Electronics Show*, critics gave Recoton's new wireless stereo speaker system the *Design and Engineering Award* for being the "most innovative and outstanding new product."

Recoton was able to introduce this whole new generation of powerful wireless speakers due to the advent of 900 MHz technology. This newly approved breakthrough enables Recoton's wireless speakers to rival the sound of expensive wired speakers.

Recently approved technology. In June of 1989, the *Federal Communications Commission* allocated a band of radio frequencies stretching from 902 to 928 MHz for wireless, in-home product applications. Recoton, one of the world's leading wireless speaker manufacturers, took advantage of the FCC ruling by creating and introducing a new speaker system that utilizes the recently approved frequency band to transmit clearer, stronger stereo signals throughout your home.

Crisp sound throughout your home. Just imagine being able to listen to your stereo, TV, VCR or CD player in any room of your home without having to run miles of speaker wire. Plus, you'll never have to worry about range because the new 900 MHz technology allows stereo signals to travel over distances of 150 feet or more through walls, ceilings and floors without losing sound quality.

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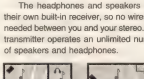
Recoton gives you the freedom to listen to music wherever you want. Your music is no longer limited to the room your stereo is in. With the wireless headphones you can listen to your TV, stereo or CD player while you move freely between rooms, exercise or do other activities. And unlike infrared headphones, you don't have to be in a line-of-sight with the transmitter, giving you a full 150 foot range.

The headphones and speakers have their own built-in receiver, so no wires are needed between you and your stereo. One transmitter operates an unlimited number of speakers and headphones.



Recoton's transmitter sends music through walls to wireless speakers over a 75,000 square foot area.

One transmitter, unlimited receivers. The powerful transmitter plugs into a headphone, audio-out or tape-out jack on your stereo or TV component, transmitting music wirelessly to your speakers or headphones. The speakers plug into an outlet. The one transmitter can broadcast to an unlimited number of stereo speakers and headphones. And since each speaker contains its own built in receiver/amplifier, there are no wires running from the stereo to the speakers.

Full dynamic range. The speaker, mounted in a bookshelf-sized acoustically constructed cabinet, provides a two-way bass reflex design for individual bass boost control. Full dynamic range is achieved by the use of a 2" tweeter and 4" woofer. Plus, automatic digital lock-in tuning guarantees optimum reception and eliminates drift. The new technology provides static-free, interference-free sound in virtually any environment. These speakers are also self-amplified; they can't be blown out no matter what your stereo's wattage.

Stereo or hi-fi, you decide. These speakers have the option of either stereo or hi-fi sound. You can use two speakers, one set on right channel and the other on left, for full stereo separation. Or, if you just want an extra speaker in another room, set it on mono and listen to both channels on one speaker. Mono combines both left and right channels for hi-fi sound. This option lets you put a pair of speakers in the den and get full stereo separation or put one speaker in the kitchen and get complete hi-fi sound.

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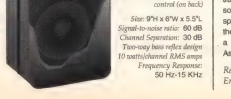
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Recoton's Design and Engineering Award

a stab of fear and yawned to cover it up. Caruso, short and wiry, spoke little English. White, a tall, thick-necked monolith, prudently kept his mouth shut. They began moving about, keeping well away from the sergeant.

Trooper Eddie McGlynn pulled off his blanket and clutched his stomach. A moan escaped before he could catch it between clenched teeth. "Your stomach ain't your problem, McGlynn, I am," he heard Sergeant Jonas growl in his ear. "Don't look so worried, you redheaded runt. I haven't killed a trooper yet." Yes, sir, no, sir—God, how Eddie McGlynn hated officers. He spat on the ground. Back in Chicago he remembered always being hungry and cold, with nowhere to sleep. Seems like he hadn't fared much better in the army.

Angus Pritchard kept adjusting his body, trying to find a comfortable position. He sat amid the rocks, daring not to think of what might happen. A short man with the pinched face of a church deacon and wire glasses that constantly needed rescuing from the tip of his nose, he was used to discomfort. It was a salesman's lot.

Lieutenant Lyons appeared at the edge of the camp. Pritchard kept his eyes on the officer, watching intently as Lyons summoned Sergeant Jonas with a nod of his head. He saw the two men speak in quick, silent gestures. Somehow he didn't feel any safer now, with these soldiers, than he had at the ferry station. Pritchard stayed close to Lyons. The man was his talisman—someone to ensure a safe journey home to his baby daughter.

"Lieutenant," he whispered softly, hoping his tone masked his fear. "When are we getting to Fort Fettermann?"

No one listened.

A faint breeze stirred the air, bringing with it the distant sound of thunder. An owl hooted in the distance. Pritchard shivered as a hand pressed his shoulder and Sergeant Jonas growled in his ear, "Move."

"What are the odds on us getting to the fort?" Pritchard whispered to no one in particular. Sergeant Jonas scratched his face and frowned. "With you along, six to one against." Lyons heard them and dug in his pocket. "This says we'll make it." Pritchard could only stare at the coin pressed into his hand. *Lieutenant, if you lose,* he thought, *I won't be around to collect.*

Overhead, the sky was beginning to burn gray with the coming dawn. The wind blew stronger, stirring the grasses and leaves. A single file of men and horses began walking as quietly as possible along a path that was barely visible by day. Otwah took point. Lyons was last in line behind Pritchard. Once, his eyes caught a flicker of movement behind him in a stand of cottonwood. After watching for a time he figured he was mistaken.

The group moved as quietly as possible as they passed close to Wolf Robe's camp. The faint aroma of wood smoke blended with the steady drizzle. An old woman was out gathering sticks for the fire. Some small boys were getting ready to drive the ponies to water. Lyons turned to leave. His horse stood tense, ears thrust forward, staring into the trees on the ridge above him. In the distance Lyons heard a faint rubbing, clinking of metal, and the low mutter of voices snaking through the mist. He raised his body and peered over the edge of the grassy ridge. Somewhere above him in the cottonwoods, a shadow moved.

Lt. Col. J. Elliot Caultrain could barely contain himself. He was concealed, along with the rest of his patrol, in a thick stand of cottonwood overlooking the Cheyenne camp. From his blond curls and crisply barbered goatee to the cut of his custom-tailored uniform, Caultrain looked every inch a cavalry officer. He tapped a cheroot against the back of his hand, then stuck it in his mouth. All the while, his heart pounded like a piston.

"Give me ten good men and I will ride through the Sioux nation." That's what he had told the officers at Fort Fettermann. Newly arrived from Washington, Lieutenant Colonel Caultrain was about to attack and annihilate his first hostile Indian village. Visions of glory raced through his head. He looked at his second in command, Lt. Charles Wilkens.

"Sir, is this wise?" Wilkens spoke softly, handing Caultrain his pocket scope. "General Gebhardt only wanted reports of Indian activity."

Wilkens had served with Caultrain long enough to know that he was a man of grand gestures and displays of great bravado, when it suited him. He also knew this prairie was deceptive. From a dis-

In the distance, Lyons heard a faint rubbing, clinking of metal, and the low mutter of voices snaking through the mist.

tance a man could feel certain he was seeing everything for miles, then miss half the Cheyenne nation hiding in the hollows between the low hills.

"At best, Colonel, we should wait until dawn. It's hard to see what's down there."

"Scared, Lieutenant?" Caultrain was a man who took advantage of his opportunities. Money had been paid, strings had been pulled, to obtain an appointment to General Custer's command. Custer was an officer who had ambition, whose star was on the rise. When the appointment had failed, Caultrain's hunger for general's stripes had become an obsession. And this Indian camp was an opportunity for ready-made glory. Nothing mattered now except that he, J. Elliot Caultrain, son of a senator, nephew of a governor, had suddenly been thrust into a role in history.

Caultrain extended the pocket scope full length, screwed it into his left eye socket, and made a show of moving it about. He looked down at the scattered tepees near the river. All seemed quiet. There was no one about except an old woman and some small boys. He retracted the scope and handed it to Wilkens. Caultrain took a long, deep breath and began considering options, asking himself endless questions, then playing out battle scenarios in his head. The sky grew gray with approaching daylight. The time to act was now. Lt. Col. J. Elliot Caultrain drew his custom-made, pearl-handled Colt from his holster and signaled the charge.

The sudden flash of light was followed by loud noise. At first Lyons thought it was thunder. Almost too late he realized it was a shot. The old squaw collapsed not more than ten yards in front of him. A bugle sounded high and thin. And his world fell apart.

Lyons did not hear the hoofbeats, only felt the earth rumble beneath his feet. He pushed Pritchard hard between the shoulder blades with the flat of his hand. The little man pitched forward onto his face. Then Lyons joined him, just as the wave of cavalry rode down the hill and over the rim of the gully where they hid. Caultrain's troops were spread out in charge formation, Springfields popping and flashing in the dim gray mist of dawn. Shouts and curses echoed off rocks and trees. After what seemed an hour but couldn't have been more than a few minutes, the last rider passed. Lyons leaped to his feet and a barrage of images assaulted him.

Lyons's mission was to pick up information and deliver it to the general. Now his patrol was faced with a scenario he knew his men were not prepared for. He hoped training and discipline would overcome shock and the men would respond accordingly. Lyons hadn't felt so helpless since the day he had signed on with the Illinois Militia. Up the trail, he could see Sergeant Jonas firing, while in front of him, a nightmare unfolded.

Caultrain and his men rode into camp with a flourish. Old Wolf Robe stepped out; Caultrain took aim and fired. At that moment the rest of the Indians burst out of the tepees, firing their Winchesters. Horses turned, galloped, and shook their manes, rearing and pawing the air before tossing their riders and fleeing into the mist. Screams wound their way through the popping pistols and thudding hoofs. This was not war in the grand style—not the pageantry Colonel Caultrain craved. Here were only shafts of early morning light stabbing through trees; Indians you couldn't see, but who were always firing.

Caultrain's troops were spread out in charge formation, Springfields popping and flashing in the dim gray mist of dawn.

One moment Wolf Robe's camp was alive with men and horses, and the next only smoke, drifting cautiously as if unsure that it was safe to depart. Caultrain and his remaining soldiers positioned themselves in a group of trees near the riverbank.

Dazzled, repelled, frightened, and aroused, the men in Lyons's patrol listened to the noise of war.

Privates Caruso and White had reached the bank of the Powder River. As they began to cross their horses shied, panicked by the gunfire. White lost the reins. The two men fell into the current and were swept downstream toward the Sioux camp.

Otwah saw the men go down and reached out to grab them. A bullet smashed into his thigh with such force that he spun in a half turn, barely managing to grab a branch and haul himself onto the riverbank. He crawled behind a thick bush and began jerking spent cartridges from the cylinder of his colt, replacing them from his belt. He began returning fire, muttering under his breath about the wisdom of scouting for the U.S. Cavalry.

Sergeant Jonas used the barrel of his Springfield to part the brush

and saw Caultrain's attack. "There goes a fool. Quite a sight, eh, lad?"

McGlynn popped his head up over the edge of the ridge for a quick second and saw two of Caultrain's men fall, mortally wounded. "Yes, sir," he said, his face gone white. Squeezing his body down, McGlynn sat motionless, listening in silent terror to the gunfire, the screams of wounded horses and men. He felt as if he was going to vomit. He clutched his stomach and bile retreated from his throat. "Holy Hannah, sir," he whispered, looking toward the sergeant. But Jonas was slumped over, a bullet through his head. McGlynn looked anxiously around. Amid the smoke and shouts, he was alone. He pulled his cap down hard on his head and began crawling toward the horses. Waiting in bread lines in Chicago didn't seem so bad.

Shots whistled closer and closer, tearing at his clothes, as Lyons crawled toward a group of cottonwoods. Through the smoke he could see what was left of Caultrain's patrol. He was angry at Caultrain and even angrier at himself. Years of training had made his body act, even though his head had told him that Caultrain was a fool and he should have let him dig out of his own mess.

Caultrain was waving his pistol like a madman. "What are you doing here, Lyons? This is my command." An Indian loomed up before him and Caultrain shot without lifting the gun above his belt line.

"Well, Lieutenant Colonel Caultrain, sir." Lyons always addressed him with his full, ridiculous title, stressing the last word.

The pistol throbbed in Lyons's grasp; he could feel its kick and see smoke whooshing out of the barrel.

"Move back to that ridge, now, sir." Indians were haphazard fighters. Lyons knew that as suddenly as this had started, the Indians would seem to fade away.

At the same time, they saw Otwah wade into the river toward Troopers Caruso and White. Caultrain immediately aimed his Colt at the scout's head.

"No! That's Otwah, General Gebhardt's scout." Lyons grabbed Caultrain's arm, twisting it hard as he fired.

"Don't be smart with me, Lieutenant. An Indian's an Indian."

Lyons felt his anger rising, and in one quick movement he hit Caultrain.

The colonel staggered but caught himself. The muscles in his jaw tightened and a faint trickle of blood formed at his mouth.

"The rest of the Sioux will attack any minute, Colonel, *sir,*" Lyons said.

"Sioux? Even I know the Sioux and Cheyenne do not associate," Lieutenant Wilkens answered.

"Well, you're giving them good reason to." Lyons glared at Wilkens. "Who tells the general that because of your flashy colonel, we've got a Sioux war on our hands? You or me?"

Lieutenant Wilkens opened his mouth to speak, but thought better of it.

Suddenly, the far bank of the Powder began vomiting a never-ending line of Sioux, all yelling and waving Winchesters. Panic shattered Caultrain's mind into disconnected pieces. In one stroke his ability to process information and make decisions disintegrated. Lieutenant Wilkens and the rest of Caultrain's men fought their fear and quickly opened fire.

Almost absentmindedly Caultrain picked up a Springfield. "Get out, Lyons. And watch your back."

Lyons dived through the thick grass into the gully, landing next to Sergeant Jonas's body. He saw Pritchard, groping for his glasses, but no one else. Sensing a movement, he looked around into the eyes of a Sioux. For a split second they both stared, then Lyons jerked his rifle forward. The muzzle struck the Indian below the eye. Another Sioux came up fast with a knife and Lyons hit him with the rifle butt, followed by the barrel.

Positioning himself on the ridge, Lyons took a deep breath, willing himself to relax. His Colt felt slippery so he changed hands, wiping his palm on his shirt, then switching back. Working mostly by feel he replaced the cartridges and began squeezing the trigger again and again, moving his arm in a wide arc along the top of the ridge. The pistol throbbed in his grasp; he could feel its kick and see smoke whooshing out of the barrel. Bullets tore at the ground around him, kicking up mud and grass. He felt a sharp pain in his shoulder, followed by something hard bouncing off the side of his head. An Indian came running toward him. He raised his pistol and the hammer snapped on an empty shell.

Terror distorted Pritchard's cherubic face. He picked himself up off the ground and adjusted his glasses. Surrounded by noise and

death, he wondered if there was a god of cavalry, or just plain folks, who would hear his prayer. Looking from side to side, he searched for a sign. Lyons was firing and he felt reassured. Suddenly, an Indian loomed over them. Without another thought, Pritchard saw a Springfield lying next to him and grabbed it.

Lyons turned his pistol around, ready to use it as a club, when the Indian froze in midair and fell. He looked over his shoulder and saw Pritchard holding the rifle.

Then there was silence.

Dawn broke through the overcast, turning the sky a gray-pink. The odor of smoke hung in the air. Lyons lay very still, keeping his eyes open. He was wounded and knew it. He tried lifting his arm slowly. A sharp pain in his shoulder convinced him he was still alive. In all his years in the army, during the Wilderness Campaign with Grant, out West with Gebhardt and the Apaches, the thought of death was an alien one. It was something that happened to other men. But in this instant, as he concentrated his vision on droplets of moisture sparkling on some blades of grass, the cold chill of his own mortality hit him.

Lyons took slow, easy breaths—no panic, no fear. After a while he became aware of movement, voices around him, and tried to give himself a glazed, motionless look. He recognized Caultrain's voice, then Wilkens's, loud soft, loud soft. "Leave now . . . Let Sioux finish them . . . I'll make a report . . . my story." It was like listening to an argument in another room with the door opening and closing.

But he would not will himself to close his eyes, to let go. Lyons was working so hard on not blinking, on staying perfectly still, that he failed to notice a round, cherubic face creep into the extreme corner of his range.

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"Lieutenant—Lieutenant Lyons," a soft voice whispered.

Lyons turned his head to the side and felt a sharp, stabbing pain. A moan escaped his lips.

"You're alive—I knew it. You are indeed my talisman, Lieutenant. I can count on you."

All Lyons could do was stare at scene before him. The dawn had colored the sky an orange-yellow. It was quiet, except for a faint sound of distant thunder and the whistle of the wind turning the grasses. There was only a faint drizzle, but the heavy rain would start soon. If the army was Lyons's family, then this prairie had

A sense of loss came over Lyons—a loss of something precious that would never be offered to him again.

become his home. A sense of loss came over him—a loss of something precious that would never be offered to him again. He should have gone on, never stopped at all, Lyons would tell himself over and over. Left Caultrain to sort his own mess. Funny, though, when your head tells you one thing, your life another, your head always loses.

Pritchard and give him a weak nod. Half a heartbeat later he saw a hand-tooled Mexican boot appear beside him. There was a soft whistle, and he felt the vibrations of a horse approaching. "Where are we going?"

"Otwah says there's a cave near Sage Mesa. You'll need some tending before we can make a run for the fort."

This was no time to argue. Lyons felt himself being lifted onto a saddle. Pritchard had a surprisingly strong grip for such a small man.

Otwah appeared beside them. "Well, *mon ami*, you have time now to teach us the poker game."

The two horses began to move out, past the burial ground at Old Fort Reno, north toward the rocks of Sage Mesa. Lyons, who never looked farther ahead than his next hand of cards, felt compelled to pause for a final glimpse of the

"You married, Lieutenant?"

Lyons heard himself whisper a faint, "No."

"You engaged?"

"Not lately."

"Dependent parents?"

"No," he moaned even louder.

"Oh. I suppose I couldn't interest you in any life insurance?"

Lyons started to laugh. And Otwah muttered under his breath about the wisdom of leading greenhorns anywhere.

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by BILL PRONZINI

DOC CHRISTMAS, PAINLESS DENTIST

Nothing much happens in an eastern Montana farm and cow town like Bear Paw, even in the good warm days of early summer. So when this gent Doc Christmas and his assistant come rolling into town in their fancy wagon one fine June evening, unexpected and unannounced, it caused quite a commotion.

I was in the sheriff's office, where I conduct most of my civic business, when the hubbub commenced. I hurried out like everybody else to see what it was all about. First thing I saw was the wagon. It was a big, wide John Deere drawn by two bays and painted bright red with

a shiny gold curlicue design. Smack in the middle of the design was the words: DOC CHRISTMAS, PAINLESS DENTIST. Then I saw that up on the seat was two of the oddest looking gents a body was ever likely to set eyes on. The one holding the reins was four or five inches over six foot, beanpole thin, with a head as big as a melon and chin whiskers all the way down the front of his black broadcloth suit coat. The other one, wearing a mustard-yellow outfit, was half as tall, four times as wide, and bald as an egg, and he was strumming an outlandish big banjo and singing "Buffalo Gals" in a voice loud enough to dislodge rocks from Jawbone Hill.

Well, we'd had our fair share of patent medicine drummers in Bear Paw, and once we'd even had a traveling medicine show that had a juggler and twelve trained dogs and sold an herb compound and catarrh cure that give everybody that took it the trots. But we'd never had a painless dentist before.

Fact was, I'd never heard of this here Doc Christmas. Turned out nobody else had, neither. He was brand-spanking new on the circuit, and that made him all the more of a curiosity.

Doc Christmas parked his wagon on the willow flat along the river, with its hind end aimed out toward the road. It was getting on toward dusk by then, so him and the bald gent, whose name come out to be Homer, lighted pan torches that was tied to the wheels of the wagon. Then they opened up the back end and fiddled around until they had a kind of little stage with a painted curtain behind it. Then they got up on the stage part together and Homer played more tunes on his banjo while the two of 'em sang the words, all louder than they was melodious. Then Doc Christmas begun setting out a display of dentist's instruments, on a slantboard table so the torchlight gleamed off their polished surfaces, and Homer went around handing out penny candy to the kids and printed leaflets to the adults.

I contrived to lay hands on one of the leaflets. It said that Doc Christmas was Montana Territory's newest and finest painless dentist, thanks be to his recent invention of Doc Christmas's Wonder Painkiller, "the most precious boon to mankind yet discovered."

Doc Christmas drove that gaudy wagon of his straight down Main Street, with half the townsfolk trailing after him.

He drove that gaudy wagon of his straight down Main Street and across the river bridge, with half the townsfolk trailing after him like them German citizens trailed after the Pied Piper. Not just kids—men and women, too. And I ain't ashamed to admit that one of the men was yours truly, Randolph Tucker, sheriff and mayor of Bear Paw.

It said he had dedicated his life to dispensing this fantastic new elixir, and to ridding the mouths of every citizen of Montana of loose and decayed teeth so's the rest of their teeth could remain healthy and harmonious. And at the very last it said what his services was going to cost you. Pint bottle of Doc Christmas's Wonder Painkiller, "a three months' supply with judicious use"—one dollar. A complete and thorough dental examination in his private clinic—four bits for adults, children under the age of ten free. Pulling of a loose or decayed tooth—one dollar for a simple extraction, three dollars for a difficult extraction that required more than five minutes. There was no other fees, and painless results was guaranteed to all.

As soon as the Doc had his instruments all laid out, Homer played a tune on his banjo to quieten everybody down. After which Doc Christmas began his lecture. It was some impressive. He said pretty much the same things his leaflet said, only in words so eloquent any politician would've been proud to steal 'em for his own.

Then he said he was willing to demonstrate the fabulous power of his painkiller as a public service without cost to the first suffering citizen who volunteered to have a tooth drawn. Was there any poor soul here who had an aching molar or throbbing bicuspid? If so, Doc Christmas invited him or her to step right up and be relieved.

Well, I figured it might take more than that for the Doc to get himself a customer, even one for free. Folks in Bear Paw is just natural reticent when it comes to strangers and newfangled painkillers, particular after the traveling medicine show's catarrh cure. But I was wrong. His offer was took up then and there by *two* citizens, not just one.

The first to speak up was Ned Flowers, who owns the feed and grain store. He was standing close in front, and no sooner had the Doc finished his invite than Ned shouted, "I volunteer! I've got a side molar that's been giving me conniption fits for near a month."

"Step up here with me, sir," Doc

Christmas said, "right up here with Homer and me."

Ned got one foot on the wagon, but not the second. There was a sudden roar and somebody come barreling through the crowd like a bull on the scent of nine heifers, scattering bodies every which way. I knowed who it was even before I saw him and heard his voice boom out, "No you don't, Flowers! I got me a worse toothache than you or any man in sixteen counties. I'm gettin' my molar yanked first and I'm gettin' it yanked free and I ain't takin' argument from you nor nobody else!"

Elrod Patch. Bear Paw's blacksmith and bully, the meanest gent I ever had the misfortune to know personal. I'd arrested him six times in seven years, on charges from drunk and disorderly to cheating customers to assault and battery to caving in the skull of Abe Coltrane's stud Appaloosa when it kicked him whilst he was trying to shoe it, and I could've arrested him a dozen more times if I'd had enough evidence. He belonged in Deer Lodge Penitentiary, but he'd never been convicted of a felony offense, nor even spent more than a few days in my jail. Offended parties and witnesses had a peculiar way of dropping their complaints and changing their testimony when it come time to face the circuit judge.

Patch charged right up to the Doc's wagon and shoved Ned outen the way and knocked him down, even though Ned wasn't fixing to argue. Then he clumb up on the stage, making the boards creak and groan and sag some. He was big, Patch was, muscle and fat both, with a wild tangle of red hair and a red mustache. He stood with his feet planted wide and looked hard at Doc Christmas. He'd been even meaner than usual lately and now we all knew why.

Elrod Patch was Bear Paw's blacksmith and bully, the meanest gent I ever had the misfortune to know personal.

"All right, sawbones," he said. "Pick up your tools and start yankin'."

"I am not a doctor, sir. I am a painless dentist."

"Same thing to me. Where do I sit?"

The Doc fluffed out his whiskers and said, "The other gentleman volunteered first, Mr.—"

"Patch, Elrod Patch, and I don't care if half of Bear Paw volunteered first. I'm here and I'm the one sufferin' the worst. Get to it. And it damn well better be painless, too."

I could've gone up there and stepped in on Ned Flowers's behalf, but it would've meant trouble, and I wasn't up to any trouble tonight if it could be avoided. Doc Christmas didn't want none, either. He said to Patch, "Very well, sir," and made a signal to his assistant. Homer went behind the painted curtain, come out again with a chair like a cut-down barber's chair with a long horizontal rod at the top. He plunked the chair down next to the table that held the Doc's instruments. Then he lighted the lantern and hooked it on the end of the rod.

Patch squeezed his bulk into the chair. The Doc opened up Patch's mouth with one long-fingered hand, poked and prodded some inside, then went and got a funny-looking tool and poked and prodded with that. He done it real gentle, too. Patch squirmed some, but never made a sound the whole time.

Homer come over with a bottle of Doc Christmas's Wonder Painkiller, and the Doc held it up to show the crowd whilst he done some more orating on its virtues. After which he unstoppered it and swabbed some thick brown liquid on Patch's jaw, and rubbed more of it inside of Patch's mouth. When he was done Homer handed him a pair of forceps, which the Doc brandished for the assemblage. That painkiller of his sure looked to be doing what it was advertised to do, for Patch was sitting quiet in the chair with a less hostile look on his ugly face.

He wasn't quiet for long, though. All of a sudden Homer took up his banjo and commenced to play and sing "Camptown Races" real loud. And with more strength than I'd figured was in that beanpole frame, Doc Christmas grabbed old Patch around the head with his hand tight over the windpipe, shoved the forceps into his wide open maw, got him a grip on the offending molar, and started yanking.

It looked to me like Patch must be yelling something fierce. Leastways his legs was kicking and his arms was flapping. But Homer's banjo playing and singing was too loud to hear anything else. The Doc yanked and Patch struggled for what must've been about a minute and a half. Then the Doc let go of his windpipe and with a flourish he held up the forceps, at the end of which was Patch's bloody tooth.

Patch tried to get up outen the chair. Doc Christmas shoved him back down, took a big wad of cotton off the table, and poked that

into Patch's maw. Right then Homer quit kicking and caterwauling. As soon as it was quiet the Doc said to the crowd, "A simple, painless extraction, ladies and gentlemen, accomplished in less time than it takes to peel and core an apple. It was painless, was it not, Mr. Patch?"

Patch was on his feet now. He was wobbly and he seemed a mite dazed. He tried to say something, but with all that cotton in his mouth the words come out garbled and thick, so's you couldn't understand none of 'em. Homer and the Doc handed him down off the wagon. The townsfolk parted fast as Patch weaved his way through, giving him plenty of room. He passed close to me on his way out to the road, and he looked some stunned, for a fact. Whatever was in Doc Christmas's Wonder Painkiller sure must be a marvel of medical science.

he townsfolk parted fast as Patch weaved his way through, giving him plenty of room. He looked some stunned, for a fact.

Well, as soon as folks saw that Patch wasn't going to kick up a ruckus, they applauded Doc and Homer and pushed in closer to the wagon. In the next half hour, Doc Christmas pulled Ned Flowers's bad tooth and give a dozen four-bit dental examinations, and Homer sold nineteen bottles of the painkiller. I bought a pint myself. I figured it was the least I could do in appreciation for the show they'd put on and that stunned look on Patch's face when he passed me by.

I was in my office early next morning, studying on the city council's proposal to buy fireworks from an outfit in Helena for this year's Fourth of July celebration, when Doc Christmas and Homer walked in. Surprised me to see 'em, particular since Homer looked some vexed. Not the Doc, though. He'd struck me as the practical and unflappable sort last night and he struck me the same in the light of day.

"Sheriff," he said, fluffing out his whiskers, "I wish to make a complaint."

"That so? What kind of complaint?"

"One of the citizens of Bear Paw threatened my life not twenty minutes ago. Homer's life, as well."

Uh-oh, I thought. "Wouldn't be Elrod Patch, would it?"

"It would. The man is a philistine."

"Won't get no argument from me on that," I said. "Philistine, troublemaker, and holy terror. What'd he threaten you and Homer for? Body'd think he'd be grateful, after you yanked his bad tooth free of charge."

"He claims it was not the painless extraction I guaranteed."

"Oh, he does."

"Claims to have suffered grievously the whole night long," Doc Christmas said, "and to still be in severe pain this morning. I explained to him that some discomfort is natural after an extraction, and that if he had paid heed to my lecture he would have understood the necessity of purchasing an entire bottle of Doc Christmas's Wonder Painkiller. Had he done so, he would have slept like an innocent babe and be mostly fit as a fiddle today."

"What'd he say to that?"

"He insisted that I should have supplied a bottle of my Wonder Painkiller gratis. I informed him again that only the public extraction was gratis, but he refused to listen."

"Just one of his many faults."

"He demanded a free bottle then and there. Of course I did not knuckle under to such blatant extortion."

"That when he threatened your life?"

"In foul and abusive language."

"Uh-huh. Any witnesses?"

"No, sir. We three were alone at the wagon."

"Well, then, sir," I said, "there just ain't much I can do legally. I don't know what to tell you gents, except that so far as I know, Patch ain't never killed anybody human. So the chances are he won't follow up on his threat."

"But he would go so far as to damage my wagon and equipment, would he not?"

"He might, if he was riled enough. He threaten to do that, too?"

"He did."

"Hell and damn. I'll have to talk with him, Doc, try to settle him down. But he don't like me and I don't like him, so I don't expect it'll do much good. How long you and Homer fixing to stay on in Bear Paw?"

"Business was brisk last evening," the Doc said. "We anticipate it will be likewise today and tomorrow as well, once word spreads of my dental skills and the stupendous properties of Doc Christmas's Wonder Painkiller."

"I don't suppose you'd consider cutting your visit short and moving on elsewheres?"

He drew himself up. "I would

not, sir. Doc Christmas flees before the wrath of no man."

"I was afraid of that. Uh, how long you reckon Patch's mouth will hurt without he treats it with more of your Wonder Painkiller?"

"The exact length of time varies from patient to patient. A day, two days, perhaps as long as a week."

I sighed. "I was afraid of that, too."

Patch was banging away at a red-hot horseshoe with his five-pound sledgehammer when I walked into his blacksmith's shop. Doing it with a vengeance, too, as if it was Doc Christmas's head forked there on his anvil. The whole left side of his face was swelled up something wicked.

He glared when he saw me. "What in hell you want, Tucker?"

"A few peaceable words, is all."

"Got nothin' to say to you. Besides, my mouth hurts too damn much to talk." Then, Patch being Patch, he went ahead and jawed to me anyways. "Look at what that travelin' tooth puller done to me last night. Hurts twice as bad with the tooth out than it done with it in."

"Well, you did rush up and volunteer to have it yanked."

"I didn't volunteer for no swole-up face like I got now. Painless dentist, hell!"

"It's my understanding you threatened him and his assistant with bodily harm."

"Run to you, did he?" Patch said. "Well, it'd serve both of 'em right if I blowed their heads off with my twelve-gauge."

"You'd hang, Patch. High and quick."

He tried to scowl, but it hurt his face and he winced instead. He give the horseshoe another lick with his hammer, then dropped it into a bucket of water. He watched it steam and sizzle before he said, "They's other ways to skin a cat."

"Meaning?"

"Like I said. They's other ways to skin a cat."

"Patch, you listen to me. You do anything to Doc Christmas or Homer or that wagon of theirs, anything at all, I'll slap you in jail right sudden and see that you pay dear."

"I ain't afraid of you, Tucker. You and me's gonna tangle one of these days anyhow."

"Better not, if you know what's good for you."

"I know what's good for me right now, and that's some of that bustard's painkiller. It's the genuine article, even if he ain't. And I aim to get me a bottle."

"Now, that's the first sensible thing I heard you say. Whyn't you and me mosey on down to the river together so's you can buy one?"

"Buy? I ain't gonna *buy* somethin' I should of got for nothin'!"

"Oh, Lordy, Patch. Doc Christmas never promised you a free bottle of painkiller. All he promised was to draw your bad tooth, which he done."

Patch was banging away at a red-hot horseshoe when I walked into his blacksmith's shop.

"One's free, so's the other," Patch said. "Ain't nobody cheats Elrod Patch outen what's rightfully his and gets away with it. Sure not no flimflammin' long drink of water that claims to be a painless dentist."

Well, it just wasn't no use. I'd have got more satisfaction trying to talk sense to a cottonwood stump. But I give it one last try before I took myself out of there. I said, "You're warned, mister. Stay away from Doc Christmas and Homer and their wagon or you'll suffer worse 'n you are now by half. And that's a promise."

All I got for an answer was a snort. He was on his way to the forge by then, else I reckon he'd have laughed right in my face.

Long about noonday I had an inspiration.

I walked home to Madge Tolliver's boardinghouse for my noon meal, which I like to do as often as I can on account of Madge being the best cook in town, and afterwards I went upstairs to my room for the bottle of Doc Christmas's Wonder Painkiller I'd bought last night. Outside again, I spied the Ames boy, Tommy, rolling his hoop. I give Tommy a nickel to take the bottle to the blacksmith's shop. I said he should tell Patch it was from Doc Christmas and that it was a peace offering, free of charge. I don't like fibbing or having youngsters fib for me, but in this case I reckoned I was on the side of the angels and it was a pardonable sin. Sometimes the only way you can deal with the devil is by using his own methods.

I waited fifteen minutes for Tommy to come back. When he did he didn't have the bottle of painkiller with him, which I took to be a good sign. But it wasn't.

"He took it all right, Mr. Tucker," Tommy said. "Then he laughed real nasty and said he suspicioned it was from you, not Doc Christmas."

"Blast him for a sly fox!"

"He said now he had *two* bottles of painkiller, and his mouth didn't hurt no more, but it didn't make

a lick of difference in how he felt toward that blankety-blank tooth puller."

"Two bottles?"

"Got the other one from Mr. Flowers, he said."

"By coercion, I'll warrant."

"What's coercion?"

"Never you mind about that. Patch didn't say what he was fixing to do about Doc Christmas, did he?"

"No, sir, he sure didn't."

I left Tommy and stumped on down to the river to see the Doc. There was a crowd around his wagon again, not as large today, but still good-sized. Doc had a farmer in the chair and was yanking a tooth while Homer played his banjo and sang "Camptown Races." I waited until they was done and eight more bottles of the Wonder Painkiller had been sold. Then I got the Doc off to one side for a confab.

I told him what Patch had said to me and to Tommy Ames. I thought it might scare him some, but it didn't. He drew himself up the way he liked to do, fluffed his whiskers, and said, "Homer and I refuse to be intimidated by the likes of Elrod Patch."

"He can be mean, Doc, and that's a fact. He's as likely as a visit from the Grim Reaper to make trouble for you."

"Be that as it may."

"Doc, I'd take it as a personal favor if you'd pull up stakes and move on right now. By the time you make your circuit back to Bear Paw, Patch'll have forgot his grudge—"

"I'm sorry, Sheriff Tucker, but that would be the cowardly way and Homer and I are men, not spineless whelps. The law and the Almighty can send us fleeing, but no man can without just cause."

Well, he had a point and I couldn't argue with it. He was on public land and he hadn't broke any laws, including the Almighty's. I wished him well and went back to town.

But I was feeling uneasy in my mind and tight in my bones. There was going to be trouble, sure as God made little green apples, and now I couldn't see no smart nor legal way to stop it.

It happened some past midnight, and depending on how you looked at it, it was plain trouble or trouble with a fitting end and a silver lining. Most if not all of Bear Paw looked at it the second way. And I'd be a hypocrite if I said I wasn't one of the majority.

I was sound asleep when the knocking commenced on the door to my room at the boardinghouse. I lighted my lamp before I opened up. It was Doc Christmas, looking as unflappable as ever.

First thing he done was unbutton his frock coat and hand me a pistol, butt first, that had been tucked into his belt. It was an old Root's Patent Model .31 caliber

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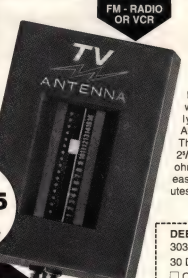

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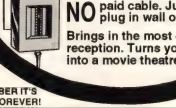

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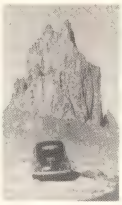

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with a side hammer like a musket hammer, a weapon I hadn't seen in many a year. But it looked to be in fine working order, and the barrel was warm.

"Sheriff," he said then, "I wish to report a shooting."

"Who got shot?"

"Elrod Patch."

"Oh, Lordy. Is he dead?"

"As the proverbial doornail."

"You the one who shot him?"

"I am. In self-defense."

He might've been telling me the time of night—he was that calm and matter-of-fact. Practical to a fault, that was the Doc. What was done was done and there wasn't no sense in getting exercised about it.

I asked him, "Where'd it happen?"

"On the willow flat near where my wagon is parked. Homer is waiting there for us. Shall we proceed?"

I got dressed in a hurry and we hustled on down to the river. Homer was tending to one of the bay horses, both of which seemed unusual skittish. Nearby, between where the horses was picketed and the wagon, Elrod Patch lay sprawled out on his back. In one hand he held a five-pound sledgehammer, of all things, and there was a bullet hole where he'd once had a right eye.

"It was unavoidable, Sheriff," Homer said as I bent to look at Patch. "He rushed at the Doc with that hammer and left him no choice."

"What in tarnation was Patch doing here with a sledgehammer? Not attempting to murder you gents in your beds, was he?"

"No," Doc Christmas said. "He was attempting to murder our horses."

"Your horses?"

"It was their frightened cries that woke Homer and me. Fortunately, we emerged from the wagon before he had time to do more than strike one of the animals a glancing blow."

Well, I knew right then that the Doc and Homer was telling the truth. Patch had caved in the skull of Abe Coltrane's stud Appaloosa with nary a qualm nor regret, and I could see where doing the same to a couple of wagon horses would be just his idea of revenge. Still, I had my duty. I looked close at the sledgehammer to make sure it was Patch's. It was; his initials was cut into the handle. Then I examined the bay that had been struck and found a bloody mark across his neck and withers. That was enough for me.

"Self-defense and death by misadventure," I said, and I give the Doc back his .31 Root's. "Patch had it coming—no mistake about that, neither. Too bad you had to be the one to send him to his reward, Doc."

He said, "Yes," but he looked kind of thoughtful when he said it.

* * *

Doc Christmas come to see me one more time, late the following afternoon at my office. At first I thought it was just to tell me him and Homer was leaving soon for Sayersville. Then I thought it was to ask if they'd be welcome back when Bear Paw come up on their circuit again next spring, which I said they would be. But them two things was only preambles to the real purpose of his visit.

"Sheriff Tucker," he said, "it is my understanding that you are also the mayor and city treasurer of Bear Paw. Is this correct?"

"It is," I said. "I'm likewise chairman of the annual Fourth of July celebration and head of the burial commission. Folks figured it was better to pay one man a salary for wearing lots of hats than a bunch of men salaries for wearing one hat apiece."

"Then you are empowered to pay out public funds for services to the community."

"I am. What're you getting at, Doc?"

"The fact," he said, "that Bear Paw owes me three dollars."

"Bear Paw does what? What in tarnation for?"

"Services rendered."

"Come again?"

"Services rendered," the Doc said. "I am a painless dentist, as you well know—the finest and most dedicated painless dentist in Montana Territory. It is my life's work and my duty and my great joy to rid the mouths of my patients of loose and decayed teeth. A town such as Bear Paw, sir, is in many ways like the mouth of one of my patients. It is healthy and harmonious only so long as its citizens—its individual teeth, if you will—are each and every one healthy and harmonious. One diseased tooth damages the entire mouth. Elrod Patch was such a diseased tooth in the mouth of Bear Paw. I did not extract him willingly from your midst, but the fact remains that I did extract him permanently—and with no harm whatsoever to the surrounding teeth. In effect, sir, painlessly.

"For a simple painless extraction I charge one dollar. You will agree, Sheriff Tucker, that the extraction of Elrod Patch was not simple, but difficult. For difficult extractions I charge three dollars. Therefore, the town of Bear Paw owes me three dollars for services rendered, payable on demand."

Did I say the Doc was practical to a fault? And then some! He was a caution, he was, with more gall than a trainload of campaigning politicians. If I'd been a lawyer, I reckon I could've come up with a good argument against his claim. But I ain't a lawyer, I'm a public servant. Besides which, when a man's right, he's right.

On behalf of the healthy and harmonious teeth of Bear Paw, I paid Doc Christmas his three dollars.

Small Company's New Golf Ball Flies Too Far; Could Obsolete Many Golf Courses

Pro Hits 400-Yard Tee Shots During Test Round

Want To Shoot An Eagle or Two ?

By Mike Hensen

MERIDEN, CT – A small golf company in Connecticut has created a new, super ball that flies like a U-2, putts with the steady roll of a cue ball and bites the green on approach shots like a dropped cat. But don't look for it on weekend TV. Long-hitting pros could make a joke out of some of golf's finest courses with it. One pro who tested the ball drove it 400 yards, reaching the green on all but the longest par-fours. Scientific tests by an independent lab using a hitting machine prove the ball out-distances major brands dramatically.

The ball's extraordinary distance comes partly from a revolutionary new dimple design that keeps the ball aloft longer. But there's also a secret change in the core that makes it rise faster off the clubhead. Another change reduces air drag. The result is a ball that gains altitude quickly, then sails like a glider. None of the changes is noticeable in the ball itself.

Despite this extraordinary performance the company has a problem. A spokesman put it this way: "In golf you need endorsements and TV publicity. This is what gets you in the pro shops and stores where 95% of all golf products are sold. Unless the pros use your ball on TV, you're virtually locked out of these outlets. TV advertising is to expensive to buy on your own, at least for us.

"Now, you've seen how far this ball can fly. Can you imagine a pro using it on TV and eagle-ing par-fours? It would turn the course into a par-three, and real men don't play par-three's. This new fly-power forces us to sell it without relying on pros or pro-shops. One way is to sell it direct from our plant. That way we can keep the name printed on the ball a secret that only a buyer would know. There's more to golf than tournaments, you know."

The company guarantees a golfer a prompt refund if the new ball doesn't cut five to ten strokes off his or her average score. Simply return the balls–new or used–to the address below. "No one else would dare do that," boasted the company's director.

If you would like an eagle or two, here's your best chance yet. Write your name and address and "Code Name S" (the ball's R&D name) on a piece of paper and send it along with a check (or your credit card number and expiration date) to National Golf Center (Dept. S-566), 500 S. Broad St., Meriden, CT 06450. Or phone 800-285-3900 anytime. No P.O. boxes. One dozen "S" balls cost $24.95, two to five dozen are only $22.00 each, six dozen are only $109.00. You save $40.70 ordering six. Shipping and handling is only $3.50 no matter how large your order. Specify white or Hi-Vision yellow.

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BY
Carla Kelly

A Season for Heroes

Ezra Freeman died yesterday. I don't usually read the obituaries, at least I didn't until after Pearl Harbor. With four grandsons in the service now and one of them missing over a place called Rabaul, or some such thing, I generally turn to the obituaries after the front page and the editorials.

There it was, right at the bottom of the column, in such small print I had to hold the paper out at arm's length... Ezra Freeman. There was no date of birth listed, probably because even Ezra hadn't known that, but it did mention there were no surviving relatives and the deceased had been a veteran of the Indian Wars.

And when I thought about Ezra Freeman, I ended up thinking about Mother and Father. Still carrying the newspaper, I went into my bedroom and looked at the picture of Mother and Father and Company D hanging on the wall

"A Season for Heroes" by Carla Kelly, from *Far West*, ©1978, by permission of the author.

next to the window. It was taken just before Father was assigned to 10th Cav headquarters, so he is still leaning on a cane in the picture. Mother is sitting on a bench holding quite a small baby and next to her, his shoulders thrown back and his feet together, is Sergeant Ezra Freeman.

The picture was taken at Fort Bowie, Arizona Territory. I was ten or eleven then and that garrison was the first memory that really stuck in my mind. It was where Dad nearly got killed and my little brother was born, and where I discovered a few things about love.

My mother was what people call lace-curtain Irish. She was born Kathleen Mary Flynn. Her father owned a rather successful brewery in upstate New York and Mother was educated in a convent, where she learned to speak French and make lace. She never owned up to learning anything else there, although she wrote a fine copperplate hand and did a lot of reading when Father was on campaign. The nuns taught her good manners and how to pour tea the right way. Father could always make her flare up by winking at her and saying in his broadest brogue, "What'll ye hev to dhrink now, Kate Flynn?"

She had beautiful red hair that curled every which way. Little springs of it were forever popping out of the bun she wore low on her neck. She had a sprinkling of light brown freckles which always mystified the Indians. I remember the time an old reservation Apache stopped us as we were walking down Tucson's main street. He spoke to Father in Apache. Dad answered him, and we could see he was trying to keep a straight face.

We pounced on him when the Indian nodded and walked away.

"What did he say, Dad? What did he say?"

Father shook his head and herded us around the corner where he leaned against the wall and laughed silently until tears shone on his eyelashes. Mother got exasperated.

"What *did* he say, John?"

"Oh, Kate Flynn," he wheezed and gasped, "he wanted to know . . . Oh God . . ." He went off into another quiet spasm.

"John!"

Mother didn't approve of people taking the Lord's name in vain (which made garrison life a trial for her at times).

"Sorry, Kathleen." Dad looked at her and winked. I could feel Mother stiffening up. "He wanted to know if you had those little brown dots all over."

We children screamed with laughter. Mother blushed. A lesser Victorian lady would have swooned, but Tucson's streets were dusty then, and Father was laughing too hard to catch her on the way down.

Mother and Father met after Father's third summer at West Point. He had been visiting friends of his family in Buffalo and Mother had been a guest of one of the daughters. They had spent a week in each other's company, then Mother had gone back to the convent. They had corresponded for several months, then Father proposed during Christmas furlough and they were married after graduation in June.

There had been serious objections from both sides of the family. Papa Flynn made Father promise to raise any children as Catholics, and Grandpa Stokes wanted to be assured that he and Grandma wouldn't be obliged to call on the Flynns very often.

Father agreed to everything and he would have raised us as Catholics, except that we seldom saw a priest out on the plains; besides, Mother wasn't a very efficient daughter of the church. I think she figured she'd had enough, what with daily mass at the convent for six years straight. But she always kept her little ebony and silver rosary in her top drawer under her handkerchiefs and I only saw her fingering it once.

I don't really remember what my father looked like in those early years. I do remember that he wasn't too tall (none of the horse soldiers were) and that the other officers called him Handsome Johnny. Mother generally called him "the Captain" when we were around. "The Captain says you should do this, Janey," or "Take the Captain's paper to him, Gerald." When he was promoted, she called him "the Major," and the last name before he died was "the Colonel." Fifteen years later, just before she died, she had started over and was calling him

Fort Bowie was where Dad nearly got killed and my little brother was born, and where I discovered a few things about love.

"the Lieutenant" again.

I was born in Baton Rouge about a year after they were married, where the 10th Cavalry was serving Reconstruction duty. Pete came along two years later at Fort Sill and Gerald was born at Fort Robinson in the Black Hills.

When I was ten, we were assigned to Fort Bowie, Arizona Territory. That was in the fall of 1881, more than sixty years ago.

Dad commanded Company D of the 10th Cavalry. The 9th and 10th Cavalry were composed entirely of Negro enlisted men, serving under white officers. The Indians called them Buffalo Soldiers, I suppose because their kinky black hair reminded them of the hair of a buffalo. Father always swore they were the best troops in the whole U.S. Army and said he was proud to serve with them, even though some of his fellow officers considered such duty a form of penance.

My favorite memory of Company D was listening to them riding into Fort Bowie after duty in the field. They always came in singing. The only man who couldn't carry a tune was my father. I remember one time right before Christmas when they rode out of Apache Pass singing "Star of the East." Even Mother came out on the porch to listen, her hand on my shoulder.

Company D had two Negro sergeants. Master Sergeant Albert Washington was a former slave from Valdosta, Georgia. He was a short, skinny little man who never said very much, maybe because he was married to Clara Washington who did our washing and sewing, and who had the loudest, strongest voice between the Mississippi and the Pacific.

The other sergeant was Ezra Freeman. Ezra wasn't much taller than my father and he had the biggest hands I ever saw. They fascinated me because he was so black and the palms of his hands were so white.

Ezra had a lovely deep voice that reminded me of chocolate pudding. I loved to hear him call the commands to the troops during Guard Mount and I loved to watch him sit in his saddle. My father was a good horseman but he never sat as tall as Ezra Freeman, and Father's shoulders got more and more stooped as the years passed. Not Ezra. Last time I saw him, sitting in his wheelchair, his posture was as good as ever, and I think he would have died before he would have leaned back.

Once I asked Ezra about his childhood. He said that he had been raised on a plantation in South Carolina. At the age of twelve, he and two sisters and his mother and father had been sold at the Savannah auction to help pay off his master's gambling debts. He never saw any of them again.

He was bought by a planter from Louisiana and stayed a field hand until Admiral Farragut steamed up the Mississippi and ended that. He sometimes spoke a funny kind of pidgin French that made my mother laugh and shake her head.

But she never got too close to Ezra, or to any of Father's other troopers. None of the other white ladies of the regiment did either. Mother never would actually pull her skirts aside when the colored troopers passed, as some of the ladies did, but she had a formality about her in the presence of the Buffalo Soldiers that we weren't accustomed to. At least, she did until the summer of 1882, when we came to owe Ezra Freeman everything.

That was the summer Ignacio and his Apaches left the San Carlos Agency and raided, looted, burned, and captured women and children to enslave or sell in Mexico. The troops garrisoned at Bowie knew that Ignacio's activities would touch them soon, and the early part of the summer was spent in refitting and requisitioning supplies and ordnance in preparation for the orders they knew would come.

Dad commanded Company D of the 10th Cavalry. The Indians called them Buffalo Soldiers.

Mother was not receiving any callers that summer. That was how we put it then. Or we might have said that she was "in delicate health." Now, in 1942, we say, "she is expecting," or "she is in the family way." But back then, that would have been altogether too vulgar and decidedly low class.

Neither of them told us. I just happened to notice Mother one morning when I burst into her room and caught her in her shift. She bulged a little in the front and I figured we were going to have another baby brother sometime. They never seemed to have girls after me. She didn't say anything then and I didn't either. Later on in the week, when we were polishing silver, she paused, put her hand on her middle, and stared off

in space for a few moments, a slight smile on her face.

At breakfast a few mornings later, Father asked Mother if she wanted to go home for the summer to have the baby. The railroad had been completed between Bowie and Tucson, and it would be a much less difficult trip.

"Oh, no, I couldn't, John," she had replied.

"Well, why not? I'll probably be gone all summer anyway." Dad wiped up the egg on his plate with one swipe of his toast and grinned when Mother frowned at him.

"Oh, I just couldn't, John," she repeated, and that was the end of that.

About two weeks later, three of the cavalry companies and two of the infantry were detached from Bowie to look for Ignacio.

Mother said her good-byes to Father inside their bedroom. As I think of it, very few of the wives ever saw their husbands off from the porch, except for Lieutenant Grizzard's wife, and everyone said she was a brassy piece anyway.

his hand on my head and shook it back and forth. Then he knelt down and kissed me on both cheeks.

"Keep an eye on Mother for me, Janey," he said.

I nodded and he stood up and shook my head again. He plucked the black hat off Pete's head and swatted him lightly with it. He knelt down again, and both Pete and Gerald clung to him.

"Now, you two mind Janey. She's sergeant major."

Company D rode out at the head of the column after Guard Mount, and the corporal who taught school for the officers' children was kind enough to dismiss us for the day.

Summers are always endless to children, but that summer of 1882 seemed to stretch out like cooling taffy. One month dragged by and then two, and still the men didn't return. In fact, another company was sent out and Bowie had only the protection of one understrength troop of infantry and the invalids in the infirmary.

The trains stopped running between Bowie and Tucson because of Ignacio and his warriors, and I

The men were now quite overdue and still Ignacio hadn't been subdued.

But we kids followed Father out onto the porch. My little brother Pete wore the battered black felt hat Dad always took on campaign and Gerald lugged out the saber, only to be sent back into the house with it. Father let me bring out his big Colt revolver, and I remember that it took both hands to carry it.

He took the gun from me and pushed it into his holster. He put

recall how irritated Mother was when the last installment of a serial in Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Weekly* never showed up. The only mail that got through was official business the couriers brought in.

But then Mother was irritated with many things that summer. She usually didn't show at all until the eighth month, but this time she had Clara Washington sew her some new Mother Hubbards before her sixth month was over. And her ankles were swollen, too. I rarely saw Mother's legs, but once I caught her on the back porch one evening with her dress up around her knees.

"Oh, Mama!" was all I said.

It startled her and she dropped her skirts and tucked her feet under the chair.

"Jane, you shouldn't spy on people!" she scolded, and then she smiled when she saw my face. "Oh, I'm sorry, Jane. And don't look worried. They'll be all right again soon."

Toward the middle of August we began to hear rumors in the garrison. Ordinarily we just shrugged off rumors, but the men were now quite overdue and still Ignacio hadn't been subdued. One rumor had the troops halfway across Mexico pursuing Apaches, and another rumor had them in San Diego waiting for a troop train back.

On the eighteenth of August (I remember the date because it was Gerald's fifth birthday), the rumor changed. A couple of reservation Apaches slouched in on their hard-bitten ponies to report a skirmish to the south of us, hard on the Mexican border. Captain Donnelly, B Company, 4th Infantry, was senior officer of the fort then and he ignored the whole thing. The Indians weren't scrupulous about the truth and they often confused Mexican and U.S. soldiers.

I mentioned the latest rumor to Mother, who smiled at me and gave me a little shake. I went back outside to play, but I noticed a look in her eyes that hadn't been there before.

Two days later the troops rode in. They were tired, sunburned and dirty, and their mounts looked mostly starved. Mother came out on the porch. She leaned on the porch railing and stood on one foot and then the other. I saw that she had taken off her wed-

ding ring and Dad's West Point ring that she wore on her first finger. Her hands looked swollen and tight.

The troops assembled on the parade ground and some of the women and children ran out to them. We looked hard for Company D but it wasn't there. Mother sat down on the bench under the parlor window.

Several of the officers dismounted and stood talking together. One of them gestured our way and Mother got up quickly. When Major Connors started walking over to our quarters, she backed into the house and jerked me in with her.

"Listen to me, Jane Elizabeth," she hissed and her fingers dug into my shoulders until I squirmed in her grasp. "You take their message."

"But Mother," I whined, trying to get out of her grip. "Why don't you?"

"It's bad luck," she said, and turned and went into the parlor, slamming the door behind her.

Major Connors didn't seem too surprised that Mother wouldn't come out to talk to him. I backed away from him a little myself, because he smelled so awful.

"Jane, tell your mother that Company D and A are both a bit overdue, but not to worry because we expect them any time."

After he left I told Mother, but she wouldn't come out of the parlor until supper time.

Several days passed, and then a week, and still no sign of either company. None of the other officers' wives said anything to Mother about it, but several of them paid her morning calls and brought along baked goods.

"Why are they doing this, Mama?" I asked her, after Captain O'Neill's wife left an eggless custard.

Mother murmured something about an early wake. I asked her what she meant but she shook her head. My brothers and I downed all the pastries and pies, but Mother wouldn't eat any of it.

I finally fell asleep after the duty guards had called the time from post to post all around the fort.

One night when I couldn't sleep because of the heat, I crept downstairs to get a drink of water from the pump. Mother was sitting on the back porch, rocking slowly in the moonlight. She heard me and closed her fist over something in her lap, but not before I'd seen what it was . . . the little ebony rosary she kept in her drawer. I could tell by the look in her eye that she didn't want me to say anything about it. She rocked on and I sat down near her on the porch steps.

"Mother, what happens if he doesn't come back?"

I hadn't meant to say that. It just came out. She stopped rocking. I thought she might be angry with me, but she wasn't.

"Oh, we just manage, Jane. It won't be as much fun, but we'll just manage."

She rocked on in silence and I could hear above the creak of the rocking chair the click of the little ebony beads. I got up to go and she took my hand.

"You know, Jane, there's one terrible thing about being a woman."

I looked down at her. Her ankles and hands were swollen, her belly stretched against the nightgown that usually hung loose on her, and her face was splotched.

"What's that, Mama?"

"The waiting, the waiting."

She didn't say anything else, so I went back upstairs and finally fell asleep after the duty guards had called the time from post to post all around the fort.

Another week passed and still no sign of the companies. The next week began as all the others had. The blue sky was cloudless and the sun beat down until the whole fort shimmered. Every glance held a mirage.

It was just after Stable Call that I heard the singing. The sound came up faintly from the west, and for a few moments I wasn't sure I heard anything except the wind and the stable noises to the south of us. But there it was again, and closer. It sounded like "Dry Bones," and that had always been one of Dad's favorite songs.

I turned to call Mother, but she was standing in the doorway, her hand shading her eyes as she squinted toward Apache Pass.

People popped out of houses all along Officers' Row, and the younger children began pointing and then running west past headquarters and the infirmary.

There they were, two columns of blue filing out of the pass, moving slowly. The singing wasn't very loud and then it died out as the two companies approached the stables.

Mother took her hand away from her eyes and walked over to the edge of the porch.

"He's not there, Jane," she whispered.

I looked again. I couldn't see Father anywhere.

She stood still on the porch and shaded her eyes again, then she gave a sob and began running.

So many nights in my dreams I've seen my mother running across the parade ground. She was so large and clumsy then, and as I recall, she was barefoot, but she ran as lightly as a young child, her arms held out in front of her. In my dreams she runs and runs until I wake up.

I was too startled to follow her at first and then I saw her run to the back of the column and drop down on her knees by a travois one of the horses was pulling. The animal reared back and then nearly kicked her, but I don't think she even noticed. Her arms were around a man lying on the travois. As I ran closer, I could see him raise his hand slowly and put it on her hair.

I backed up some more and bumped into Ezra Freeman. I tried to turn and run but he held me.

"Go over to him, Janey," he urged and gave me a push. "He wants you."

I couldn't see how Ezra could interpret the slight movement of Father's hand but he kept pushing me toward the travois.

"Pa? Pa?" I could feel tears starting behind my eyelids.

He said something that I couldn't understand because it sounded as if his mouth was full of mashed potatoes. I leaned closer. He smelled of blood, sweat, dirt, and woodsmoke. As I bent over him, I could see under the bandage on his face and gasped to see teeth and gums where his cheek should have been.

Mother was kneeling by him now, her hand on his splinted leg. She took my hand in her other hand and placed it on his chest. He tried to raise his head and I leaned closer. I could make out the words *Janey* and *home*, but what he was saying was unimportant. All of a sudden I didn't care what he looked like. He was my father and I loved him more than words could say.

He must have seen my feelings in my eyes because he lay back again and closed his eyes. His hand relaxed and let go of mine.

I helped Mother to her feet and we stood back as two orderlies lifted him off the travois and onto a stretcher. He moaned a little and Mother bit her lip.

They took him to the infirmary and Ezra Freeman walked alongside the stetcher, steadying it. Mother would have followed him, but the post surgeon took one look at her and told her to go lie down, because he didn't have time to deliver a baby just then. Mother blushed and the two of us walked back to our quarters hand in hand.

Mother spent an hour that evening in the infirmary with Father. She came home and reported he looked a lot better and was asleep. We went upstairs then and, while she tucked Gerald and Pete in bed, I sat on the rag rug by Pete's army cot, and she told us what happened.

"The two companies had separated from the main detachment and, after a couple days, they found an Apache rancheria. It was at the bottom of a small canyon near Deer Spring. When they tried to surround it before daybreak, they were pinned down by rifle fire from the rim of the canyon."

Mother paused and I noticed that she had twisted her fingers up in the afghan at the foot of Pete's bed. He sat up and prodded her.

"And what happened, Ma? What happened?"

He pulled on her arm a little and his eyes were shining. He had been down at the creek that afternoon and hadn't seen Father yet. The whole thing was still just a story to him.

While the candle on the nightstand burned lower and lower, Mother told how Father had been shot down while trying to lead the men back to the horses. He had lain on an exposed rock all morning until Ezra Freeman had crawled out and pulled him to safety. The two companies had stayed in a mesquite thicket, firing at the Apaches until the sun

I didn't recognize my father at first. It looked as though half his head had been blown away.

I didn't recognize my father at first. His hair was matted with blood and it looked as though half his head had been blown away. There was a bloody, yellowish bandage over one eye and his face was swollen.

He turned his head in my direction and I think he tried to smile, but he only bared his teeth at me and I stepped back. I wanted to turn and run and I didn't see how Mother could stand it.

But there she was, her head on his chest. She was saying something to him but I couldn't hear, and all the while he was stroking her hair with that filthy, bruised hand.

went down. They withdrew in the dark.

Pete was asleep by then, but Mother went on to say that the men had holed up for several days about sixty miles south of us because they were afraid Father would die if they moved him. When it looked like he would make it, they started for the fort.

Gerald fell asleep then, and as Mother pulled the sheet up around him, she said to me, "I can't understand it, Jane. Everyone else thought the Captain was dead. Why did Sergeant Freeman do it?"

Then she tucked me in bed.

But I couldn't sleep. Every time I closed my eyes, I kept seeing Father on that travois and the look in Mother's eyes as she knelt by him. I got out of bed and started into Mother's room.

She wasn't there. The bed hadn't even been slept in. I tiptoed down the stairs, stepping over the third tread because it always squeaked. As I groped to the bottom in the dark, I saw the front door open and then close quietly.

I waited a few seconds, then opened it and stood on the porch. Mother was dressed and wrapped in a dark shawl, despite the heat, and walking across the parade ground. She wasn't going toward the infirmary so I trailed her, skirting around the parade ground, and keeping in the shadow of the officers' quarters. I didn't know where she was going, but I had a feeling that she would send me back if she knew I was following her.

She passed the quartermaster's building and the stables, pausing to say something to the private on guard, who saluted her and waved her on. I waited until he had turned and walked into the shadows of the blacksmith shop before I continued.

I could see now that she was heading for Suds Row, where the enlisted men and their families lived. She walked to the end of the row and kept going, toward the Negro soldiers' quarters at the edge of the fort. Halfway down the row of attached quarters she stopped and knocked on one of the doors. I ducked behind the row until I came to the back of the place where she had knocked. There was a washtub in the yard and I dragged it to the window and turned it over and climbed up.

It was Ezra Freeman's quarters. He lived there with his friend Jackson Walter of Company A, Jackson's wife, Chloe, and their two children.

Mother and Ezra were standing in the middle of the room. She had taken off her shawl. Freeman offered her the chair he had been sitting in, but she shook her head. I could see Chloe in the rocking chair by the kitchen, knitting. Mother was silent for a few moments. Then: "I just wanted to say thank you, Sergeant Freeman," she said finally. Her voice sounded high and thin, like it did after Grandpa Flynn's funeral three years before.

"Oh . . . well . . . I . . . Jeez, ma'am, you're welcome," stammered Ezra.

She shrugged her shoulders and held her hands out in front of her, palms up. "I mean, Sergeant, you didn't even know if he was alive and you went out there anyway."

He didn't say anything. All I could hear was the click of Chloe's bone needles. I barely heard Mother's next word.

"Why?"

Again that silence. Ezra Freeman turned a little and I could see his face. His head was down and he had sucked in his lower lip, and he was crying. The light from the kerosene lamp was reflected in his tears and they shone like diamonds on his black face.

"Well, hell, ma'am . . . he's the only man I ever served of my own free will." He paused. "And I guess I love him."

Mother put her hands to her face and I could see her shoulders shaking. Then she raised her head and I don't think she ever looked more beautiful.

None of us had ever heard Mother swear. Father nearly dropped the baby.

"I love him, too, Ezra. Maybe for the same reasons."

Then she sort of leaned against him and his arms went around her and they held onto each other, crying. She was patting him on the back, like she did when Father hugged her, and his hand was smoothing down her hair where it curled at the neck.

I am forever grateful that the white ladies and gents of Fort Bowie never saw the two of them together like that, for I'm sure they would have been scandalized. But as I stood there peeking in the window, I had the most wonderful feeling of being surrounded by love, all kinds of love, and I wanted the moment to last and last.

But the moment soon passed. They both backed away from each other and Mother took out a handkerchief from the front of her dress and blew her nose. Ezra fished around in his pocket until he found a red bandanna and wiped his eyes. He sniffed and grinned at the same time.

"Lord almighty, ma'am. I ain't

cried since that Emancipation Proclamation."

She smiled at him and put her hand on his arm, but didn't say anything. Then she nodded to Chloe, put her shawl around her head again, and turned to the door.

"Good night and thank you again," she said before she went outside.

I jumped off the washtub and ran down the little alley behind the quarters. Staying in the shadows and watching out for the guards, I ran home. I wanted to be home before Mother because I knew she would look in on us before she went to sleep.

She did. She opened the door a crack, then opened it wider and glided in. I opened my eyes a little and stretched, as if she had just wakened me. She bent down and kissed me, then kissed Gerald and Pete. She closed the door and soon I heard her getting into bed.

One week later a couple of troopers from Company D carried Father home on a stretcher. The doctor insisted on putting him in the parlor on the daybed because he didn't want him climbing the stairs.

The post surgeon had done a pretty good job on Father's face. The bandages were off so the air could get to his cheek, which was a crisscross maze of little black sutures. He had lost his left eye and wore a patch over the socket. (Later on he tried to get used to a glass eye but never could get a good fit. He gradually accumulated a cigar box full of glass eyes, and we used to scare our city cousins with them and play a kind of lopsided marbles game.)

His mouth drooped down at one corner and made him look a little sad on one side, and none of the other officers called him Handsome Johnny again.

The day after he had been set up in the parlor, Mother went into labor. The post surgeon tried to stop him but Father climbed the stairs—slowly, hand over hand on the railing, and sat by Mother until her third boy was born.

An hour later the doctor motioned me and my brothers into the room. Mother was lying in the middle of the bed, her red hair spread around the pillow like a fan. Her freckles stood out a little more than usual, but she was smiling. Father sat in an armchair near the bed, holding the baby, who had a red face and hair to match.

"What are you going to name him?" I asked, after giving him a good look.

Mother hesitated a moment, then looked over at the baby and Father.

"Ezra Freeman Stokes," she replied quietly, her eyes on Father.

He said something to her that I couldn't understand because his face was still swollen. But Mother kept her eyes on his and snapped back to him in a low voice that sent shivers down my back.

"I don't give a damn what the garrison thinks! He's going to be Ezra Freeman!"

None of us had ever heard Mother swear and Father nearly dropped the baby. So that was how Ez got his name.

About a month later Father was promoted to major and given the Medal of Honor for "meritorious gallantry under fire at Deer Spring." I remember how he pushed that little medal around in its plush velvet case, then closed the box with a click. "I'm not the one who should be getting this," he murmured. No one could ever prevail upon him to wear it. Even when he was laid out in his coffin years later, with his full dress uniform and all his medals, I never saw that one.

Father was transferred to 10th Cavalry headquarters, then in San Antonio, and given a desk job. We didn't see much of Ezra Freeman after that and never did correspond with him because he couldn't read or write. But somehow we always heard about him from the other officers and men of Company D, and every year at Christmas, Mother sent him a dried-apple fruitcake and socks she had knitted. We knew when he retired twenty-five years later and learned in 1915 that he had entered the Old Soldiers' Home in Los Angeles.

Before Father's stroke, he paid him one visit there. I remember that it was 1919 and Father went to tell him that Captain Ezra F. Stokes had died in France of Spanish influenza.

"You know, Janey," he told me after that visit, "Ez may have been my son but I ended up comforting Sergeant Freeman. I almost wish I hadn't told him."

After Father passed away, Mother paid Ezra the yearly visit. She insisted on going alone on the train up from San Diego but when

Mother took an object out of her purse, leaned toward Ezra, and put something on his robe.

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By Charles Anton

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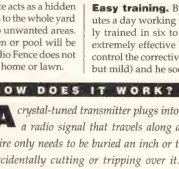

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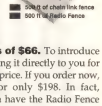

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her eyesight began to fade, she finally relented and let me come with her once. As it turned out, it was her last trip. I think she knew it.

Sergeant Freeman was in a wheelchair by then and, after giving me a nod and telling me to wait there, Mother pushed Ezra down the sidewalk to a little patio under the trees. She sat next to him on a bench and they talked together. After about half an hour she took an object out of her purse, leaned toward Ezra, and put something on the front of his robe. I couldn't see what it was, but I could tell that Ezra was protesting. He tried to push her hands away, but she went ahead and put something on him. It flashed in the sunlight, but I was too far away to make out what it was.

Then she took a handkerchief out of her pocket and wiped his eyes. She sat down again beside him and they sat there together until his head nodded forward and he fell asleep. She wheeled him back to the far entrance of the building and I never had a chance to say good-bye.

She was silent on the trip home; after we got to my house, she said, "Jane, I feel tired," and went to bed. She drifted in and out of sleep for the next two days and then she died.

After the funeral I was going through her things when I came across the plush velvet case containing the Medal of Honor Father had been awarded at Fort Bowie. I snapped it open but the medal was gone. I think I know where it went.

And now Ezra's dead. Well.

I can see that I've spent more time on this than I intended. I hear the postman's whistle outside. I hope there's a letter from my daughter Ann. Her oldest boy Steve has been missing over the Solomons for more than a month now. I don't suppose I can give her much comfort, but I can tell her something about waiting.

SHOOTOUT AT INGALLS

THERE ISN'T MUCH LEFT of the outlaw town of Ingalls, in north central Oklahoma—just the intersection of two hard-packed county roads, a community building, and some scattered homes. The town itself is gone, and the cluster of foundations that marked its center is now private property. The man who owns the property says that he's been told something important happened here a long time ago, but that he doesn't really know much about it. Oh, there's the fifteen-foot-tall rock monument that an oil company truck backed over in 1982—it was recently rebuilt, at a somewhat lesser height—but it doesn't give many clues to what happened here a century ago.

Cave near Jennings, Oklahoma, used by Bill Doolins as a hideout.

Photo courtesy the Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

And what happened was nothing less than the passing of the old—and the truly wild—West. It was the beginning of the end for the most notorious gang in Oklahoma history.

On September 1, 1893, this sleepy little town in a remote section of Oklahoma Territory was the scene of the bloodiest gunfight ever waged between deputy

BY RHEUBEN BUCKNER

U.S. marshals and an outlaw gang. When the shooting was over, three lawmen and two bystanders lay dead—a remarkably high body count for a single engagement. Only one outlaw was captured. But the real story of the Ingalls fight lies not in statistics, but in the character of the men involved in this bloody confrontation.

Bill Doolin and his Wild Bunch had been holding up trains and banks and generally raising hell for almost a year. Most members of the Wild Bunch were alumni of the Dalton Gang, which had met its end on the streets of Coffeyville on October 5, 1892. The Daltons were attempting to rob two banks in their former hometown when a mob of citizens hastily armed with hardware store guns shot them to pieces.

According to legend, the only thing that kept Bill Doolin from being gunned down with the rest of the gang in Coffeyville was a lame horse that forced him to turn back at the last minute. But what is more probable, if not as dramatic, is that the level-headed Doolin considered the Coffeyville raid foolish and asked to be counted out. But the deadly reckoning that came to his former saddle partners did not stop Doolin from immediately forming his own gang.

By all accounts, Bill Doolin was as charismatic—and as unusual—an outlaw as they came. He was unschooled and all but illiterate, but had a reputation as a natural leader. He stood six feet two inches tall and was ramrod thin. His hands were so big that they would wrap almost twice around the butt of a six-shooter, and he was a crack shot.

Doolin had his first real scrape with the law during a Fourth of July bash in 1890 at Coffeyville. Kansas was a dry state, but Doolin and some other cowboys celebrated the holiday by going to the woods and icing down a couple of tubs of bottled beer. When a pair of local constables came prowling around—as later reported by Jim Williams, a Bar X Bar rider—they asked who owned the beer. All eyes turned to Doolin, who Williams said was always assumed to be the spokesman for the cowboys. "Why, that beer don't belong to anyone," Doolin replied. "It's free, gentlemen, help yourselves."

According to legend, the Wild Bunch enforced an outlaw code of chivalry and manners, sometimes at the point of a Winchester.

A gunfight erupted when the officers attempted to haul the beer away, and although it was never proved that Doolin fired any of the shots, he was considered responsible. A warrant was issued for his arrest, setting his feet firmly on the outlaw trail. Not long after that Doolin joined the Dalton Gang, which was just beginning its fifteen-month crime spree. Doolin took part in some of the gang's biggest hauls, and he had a running argument with Bob Dalton over leadership of the gang. The dispute was settled once and for all by the Coffeyville massacre.

On the night of October 14, 1892—less than two weeks after Coffeyville—Doolin's new gang hit the Missouri Pacific at Caney, Kansas. On November 1, they robbed the Ford County Bank at Spearevile. And early in the morning of June 11, 1893, they robbed the Southern California–New Mexico Express at Cimarron, Kansas. In a running gun battle with a posse, Doolin was struck in the left heel by a .30 caliber, steel-jacketed Winchester bullet.

Doolin called his new gang the Wild Bunch. Its members included George "Bitter Creek" Newcomb, a handsome cowboy who was a principal of the Dalton Gang; William "Tulsa Jack" Blake, a gambler; Dan "Dynamite Dick" Clifton, who is said to have filled the tips of his cartridges with explosives; Roy "Arkansas Tom" Daugherty, the son of a preacher who came west to be a cowboy; and Bill Dalton, who spurned his wishful ambitions in California politics and turned outlaw after his brothers were shot down.

The Wild Bunch made no real secret of using Ingalls as a hideout. They spent their loot freely—they were the closest thing to an economic boom the town ever had—and, according to legend, enforced an outlaw code of chivalry and manners, sometimes at the point of a Winchester. One oft-repeated story had Doolin quieting a group of local toughs who were disrupting a tent sermon by threatening to "sift lead" through some of them. Another has a young deputy sheriff named Bob Andrews cornering a small-time thief identified only as "Ragged Bill" in a saloon where Doolin and several members of his gang were playing cards. When Ragged Bill asked Doolin for sanctuary in the gang, the young deputy realized his predicament and anxiously waited for the outlaw

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chief's response. "What's he done?" Doolin calmly asked the lawman. When Doolin learned that Ragged Bill had knocked an old man in the head for forty dollars, he declared that the common thief wasn't fit to "carry water" for the Wild Bunch, and escorted the deputy and his prisoner safely outside of Ingalls.

Whether the townsfolk offered comfort to the outlaws because they regarded them as American Robin Hoods, or simply because they were too terrified to resist, the result was the same: Ingalls was a haven for the Wild Bunch. The gangs of the era depended on an extensive network of informers and friends who hated banks, railroads, and authority in general, and Ingalls was at the center of this network. Bill Doolin, however, had an even more compelling reason for spending his time in the Ingalls vicinity: he had fallen in love with a nineteen-year-old store clerk named Edith Ellsworth. They were married on March 14, 1893.

It was about the same time that Evett Dumax Nix was appointed U.S. Marshal for Oklahoma Territory, ending months of political upheaval that aided the operation of gangs such as the Wild Bunch. Nix, who was the youngest of twenty-three applicants, had no law enforcement experience, but was selected by Grover Cleveland on the basis of "executive ability." Nix augmented the marshal's force by deputizing local lawmen, which gave them the authority to cross local boundaries in pursuit of felons. Among this largely unpaid force were Dick Speed, city marshal of Perkins; Tom Hueston, constable of Stillwater; and Lafayette "Lafe" Shadley, an Osage agency policeman at Pawhuska.

Since late July, the marshals had Ingalls under surveillance by a pair of lawmen posing as land surveyors for a new railroad. Based on this intelligence,

SPEED STEPPED OUT OF THE LIVERY STABLE, STEADIED HIS RIFLE ON THE FRONT WHEEL OF A BUGGY, AND FIRED.

Guthrie District Marshal John Hixon made the decision in late August to assault Ingalls. Veteran lawman Heck Thomas, however, called the plan a "fool's mission" and declined to participate.

On the morning of Friday, September 1, 1893, thirteen lawmen descended upon Ingalls with the aim of capturing the Wild Bunch. They came in covered wagons to give the appearance they were preparing for the upcoming land run—there were several hundred people already camped in and around Ingalls, awaiting the September 16 opening, and it was felt that two more wagons would not arouse suspicion. One of the wagons, captained by Tom Hueston from Stillwater, circled the town and moved in from the north. Another, which had come from Guthrie, rumbled up from the south.

There were six outlaws in town that morning. Doolin and three others—Bill Dalton, Dynamite Dick Clifton, and Tulsa Jack Blake—were in the Ransom and Murray Saloon in the center of town, playing cards. Bitter Creek Newcomb was mounting his horse to visit a local girlfriend. Arkansas Tom Daugherty, who was ill, had checked into the O.K. Hotel and was lying in bed in its unfinished attic.

Dick Speed, driver of the Stillwater wagon, brought the team to a halt in front of a livery stable on Ash Street, Ingalls's main thoroughfare. Gun in hand, Speed told the occupants of the livery stable—owner Henry Pierce and a twelve-year-old stable boy—that he was a federal officer, that there was going to be some shooting, and that they had best not notify the outlaws if they didn't want to be "killed like dogs." While Speed was making this speech, Bitter Creek Newcomb was riding north, a Winchester resting across his saddle. Newcomb was unaware of the lawmen's presence, and Speed did not know Newcomb's identity.

"Who is that rider?" Speed asked a fourteen-year-old boy named Del Simmons. Even though Simmons was just visiting in Ingalls—he was a student from Duncan Bend, Kansas—he knew who all the important outlaws were.

"Why, that's Bitter Creek," exclaimed the boy with surprise.

Speed stepped out of the livery stable, steadied his rifle on the front wheel of a buggy, and fired. The slug struck Newcomb's Winchester, bursting the magazine and letting the spring and cartridges tumble out before tearing into his groin. Despite the pain and the damaged gun Newcomb returned fire, but missed. He was unable to lever a second round, so he wheeled his horse for a getaway.

Speed stepped into the street for a clear shot at the retreating outlaw. But before Speed could finish Newcomb, a .45 caliber slug pierced his chest. Daugherty had sprung from his bed in the upper floor of the O.K. Hotel and had fired from a north gable window to save Newcomb. Bleeding badly, Newcomb made a dash for the protection of the Ransom Livery, to the south. He rode out the back and into a ravine that cut through town, making his way southeast.

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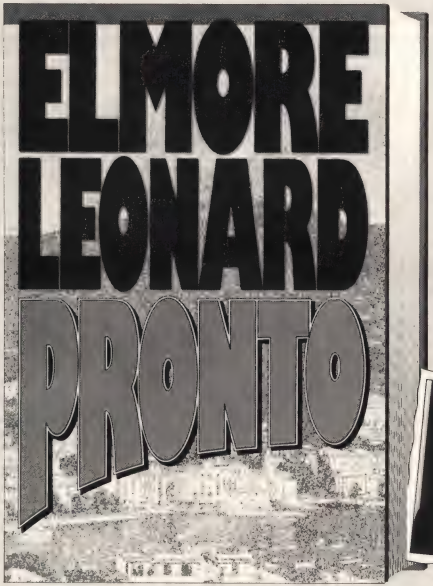

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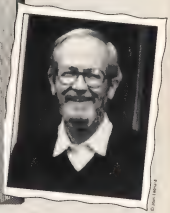

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Meanwhile, hell itself had opened up in Ingalls. In the saloon where most of the gang was pinned down, owner George Ransom recalled that the number of slugs hitting the little frame building sounded like hail. N. A. Walker, a hotel supply salesman from Cushing who was caught in the saloon, ran out the front door and was shot down by the marshals. Simmons, the visiting student, was also killed while running for cover, although it is unclear which side fired the fatal shot. When the first round of shooting stopped, the marshals shouted for the outlaws to surrender.

"Go to hell!" Doolin replied.

Doolin led the gang in a mad dash from the saloon to their horses in the adjacent stable. Neil Murray, who was alleged to have aided the outlaws' escape from the saloon by brandishing a Winchester, was shot twice in the ribs and once in the arm. Meanwhile, Arkansas Tom had punched a hole in the unfinished attic roof of the O.K. Hotel and, standing on a chair, kept up a barrage of fire to cover the gang's escape. From this sniper's position he shot marshal Tom Hueston.

Now mounted, Dalton and Tulsa Jack burst from the front door of the stable while Doolin and Dynamite Dick sprang from the rear. They all raced southwest for the protection of the ravine, only to discover that their escape was prevented by a wire fence. Dalton's horse was shot from beneath him, and as he scrambled to retrieve a pair of wire cutters from the horse's saddlebags, Arkansas Tom made his final kill from his vantage point—Marshal Lafe Shadley, who had moved close to the action. Dalton cut the fence and swung up in the saddle behind Doolin.

ARKANSAS TOM PUNCHED A HOLE IN THE UNFINISHED ATTIC ROOF OF THE O.K. HOTEL AND KEPT UP A BARRAGE OF FIRE.

The gang fled.

Arkansas Tom eventually climbed down from his perch in the O.K. Hotel and surrendered, and was reportedly crushed to learn that the gang had left him behind. Walker, the salesman who was shot running from the saloon, lingered for two weeks before he died—but not before suffering the indignity of being stripped naked and placed in the front window of an Ingalls business in a misguided attempt to "keep him cool." Dick Speed's body was loaded in a wagon along with the mortally wounded Hueston and Shadley, whom doctors in Stillwater could not save.

The Wild Bunch disappeared in the confusion surrounding the opening of the Cherokee Strip, the greatest—and last—of the Oklahoma land rushes. Newcomb recovered sufficiently to continue his career in robbery, and Doolin tried to make a go of it as an outlaw and a married man. But the killing of three marshals during the Ingalls fight sealed the fate of the Wild Bunch. To a man, they would all be tracked down and killed.

Doolin met his end in 1896, shot down by a posse led by Heck Thomas. At the time, Doolin was planning to take his wife and young son to New Mexico in an attempt to go straight. And Arkansas Tom Daugherty, released after serving less than half of a fifty-year sentence, again turned to crime. He was killed—with his guns blazing—in 1924 by police in Joplin, Missouri, after having robbed a bank in nearby Asbury.

Ingalls failed to live down its reputation as an outlaw town. And it never got a railroad. It received its death sentence when it was bypassed by the Eastern Oklahoma Railway in 1899. The population began moving away. Twenty years later—at about the same time that Daugherty was making his last anachronistic stand—nothing was left but a ghost town.

Ingalls, like the frontier that spawned it, was gone.

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A Circle of History

Tallgrass grows so high a horseman can tie the stems in a knot across his saddle pommel. (Inset) Trails that cross the Circle of History.

MAP BY SHOW HASTINGS

BY DON COLDSMITH

A FEW YEARS AGO, I was speaking to a high school English class about writers and the American West. It was near our home in east central Kansas. The teacher, in her introduction, had pointed out that her students had been reading my books, and that they were becoming pretty popular.

I was totally unprepared, then, for the first question the students had when we opened the discussion period. A young woman raised her hand and asked, "If your books are so successful, why do you live here?"

Now that's not a question, it's a *statement*. It says, plainly, "Nothin' ever happened here, and it's not going to. When I can, I'm leaving." We all feel that way as teenagers, no matter where we grow up. I did, myself. We overlook the fact that a lot of exciting things have happened in the past, *right here*...anywhere.

In many places there was more excitement than in others, of course. Some things happened more recently than others, as well. For instance, I grew up in Coffeyville, Kansas, in the southeast corner of the state. I could walk from our house about three blocks to the

The original Little House on the Prairie of TV and literary fame falls within the circle of history.

PHOTOS BY FRANK OBERLE

plaza, where I could stick my fingers in some bullet holes in the front of the hardware store. Bullet holes from the guns of the Dalton Gang when they were wiped out trying to rob both of the town's banks at once. The hardware store was still operated by the same family. People still alive were *in* that gunfight!

But, no big deal. Just some old bullet holes. *Nothin' ever happened here.*

By the time I was tossed the question about why I live where I do, I had it partly figured. I just needed a way to make people realize it.

I decided to make a list of historic events in the area.

But how *big* an area? I thought about that for a long time, and finally envisioned a circle. I took a map and a compass, and with the center at our ranch near Emporia, Kansas, drew a circle with a two hundred mile radius. (The circle is effective with its center anywhere in the eastern half of Kansas.)

When I started to list the events that have taken place in that circle, even I was astonished. It *all* happened here—the story of the great American West. I became convinced that my imaginary circle contains more American history than anywhere on the continent. (Nobody has challenged that yet.)

And it's *older* than most. For openers, parts of that territory have been claimed by six modern nations (not counting the Native Americans' obvious claims).

It begins with Spain in 1541. Henry Hudson, "discoverer" of the New York island, wasn't even born yet. By the time he sailed up the river that now bears his name, Spain had sent a half dozen or more expeditions into Kansas.

DURING THE EXPANSION PERIOD, THE COWBOY WEST WAS BORN IN THIS CIRCLE OF HISTORY.

By 1700, France was active in the area, initiating international trade with Spain *across* our circle. Later, Mexico claimed parts of it via the Spanish connection.

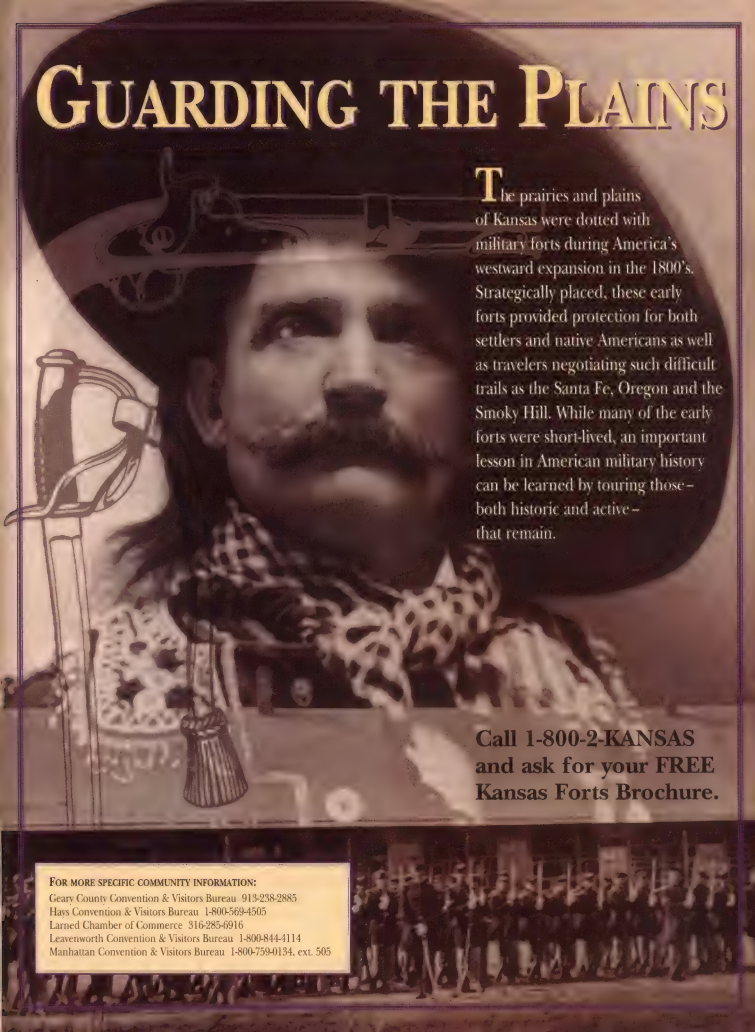
Mexican claims fell to those of yet another new nation, the Republic of Texas. The Texas panhandle, at the time it was an independent nation, included part of what is now Kansas. Part of the *circle* . . . .

The far-flung era of the fur trade was ushered in by the French. The mountain men made the circle of history their own, and all were active here. Jim Bridger, Tom Fitzpatrick, Hugh Glass, Jedediah Smith, Jim Beckwourth, Ashley, the Bents, St. Vrain, Kit Carson, John Coulter, and many others crisscrossed the circle of history.

Bent's Fort is just outside the western edge of the circle. Jedediah Smith was killed by Comanches *in* the circle. Traveling alone, he encountered two young warriors on the trail, and they stopped to visit. One man sidestepped his horse around to put his position to Smith's disadvantage. The other engaged in conversation and began to play with a small mirror that was braided into his hair as an ornament. The mirror flashed sunlight across the eyes of Smith's mule. The animal

Fort Larned, on the Santa Fe Trail, is now a National Historical site.

GUARDING THE PLAINS



The prairies and plains of Kansas were dotted with military forts during America's westward expansion in the 1800's. Strategically placed, these early forts provided protection for both settlers and native Americans as well as travelers negotiating such difficult trails as the Santa Fe, Oregon and the Smoky Hill. While many of the early forts were short-lived, an important lesson in American military history can be learned by touring those – both historic and active – that remain.

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began to toss its head and the mountain man put both hands on the reins to control it. While he was thus occupied, the other Comanche ran him through from the side with a buffalo lance.

The bloodiest claims to the circle were yet to come, with the Civil War. Slave or free? I had not fully realized that the principal guerrilla terrorists of both sides in that conflict operated within an hour's drive of our home: John Brown for the Yankee cause, William Quantrill for the South. Both the United States and the Confederate States of America hoped to make the circle their own.

There were, in addition to the guerrilla atrocities, Civil War battles in the circle—Westport, Lexington, Wilson's Creek. Pea Ridge, in Arkansas, is just outside the southeast edge of the circle. That one was a strange battle, with southern troops attacking from the north. There were Cherokee Indians fighting for the Confederacy who actually overran Union artillery batteries. They had possibly never seen artillery, but they reasoned that the cannons must be reloaded, like their own muskets. So they waited until the soldiers fired, then charged. The Union gunners retreated in panic.

In the Expansion Period, the Cowboy West was born *here*. It was a fairly short period—that of the great cattle drives from Texas to the railheads. The Chisholm Trail of song and story ran from a hundred beginnings in Texas and ended at the railheads in the circle: Sedalia, Coffeyville, Newton, Wichita, Abilene, Hays, Ellsworth, Dodge. Each faded as a "cow town" as the railroads pushed on westward. The great race by the Union Pacific Railroad to be the first to span the continent was fought largely in the same circle.

But the cowboy legend had been born. It is difficult for us to imagine how small a part of history the cowboys and the cattle drives actually were. A teenage cowboy on the first of the drives could have participated in the last of the great drives as a middle-aged working cowboy. But by this time he had become a larger-than-life hero—the romantic symbol of the West that lives on.

THE SOUTHERN ARC OF THIS CIRCLE TAKES IN THE INDIAN NATIONS, THE TRAIL OF TEARS, AND THE LAND RUSH TO THE CHEROKEE STRIP.

This was only the beginning. The frontier, the cowboy towns, brought rough elements to the area on both sides of the law. Jesse and Frank James and their band of train and bank robbers lived, robbed, and died here. Likewise, the Youngers and the Daltons. (The outlaw tradition carried on down into this century with Pretty Boy Floyd and Bonnie and Clyde.)

Lawmen such as Bat Masterson, Wild Bill Hickok, Doc Holliday, and Wyatt Earp held office in the historical circle. Hickok married Martha Jane Canary (better known as Calamity Jane) here, and later deserted her and their baby daughter. Another frontier woman of some note was Belle Starr, who lived and died in the circle.

Meanwhile, the country had entered the Expansion Period. The westward movement took place along three major trails, each following a prehistoric Indian trail along one of the rivers of the Great Plains.

The Santa Fe Trail was the trail of commerce, reaching from the Kansas City area to Spanish Santa Fe. In general, it follows the Arkansas River to Bent's Fort, then south over Raton Pass to Fort Union, and on to Santa Fe. There are several spurs and shortcuts, the most notable the Cimarron Cutoff, where Jed Smith met his fate. It is sometimes referred to as the Desert Branch at the west end, and rejoins the main trail at Fort Union.

The trail of immigration to the West was the Oregon Trail, following the Platte River. It, too, starts in our circle of history, in the Kansas City area. For a distance it follows the Kansas River, then turns northward near Topeka to cross into Nebraska and on to the Platte.

Between these two was a third trail, for yet another purpose—gold! The Colorado gold rush stimulated an urge to reach Denver as quickly as possible. The straightest line from the settlements of Kansas City and Leavenworth was the Smoky Hill Trail. Unfortunately, it was also the most dangerous, often called the Trail of Death. It, like the other two trails, started west along the Kansas River, but continued on the same course instead of veering off near Topeka. The Kansas River is formed by the Smoky Hill River at its junction with the Republican River near Fort Riley.

Which, of course, brings us to the subject of military forts. Many of the better known forts of the West are within this circle, some just outside. Forts Leavenworth, Riley, Scott, Larned, Hays, Dodge, Kearny, Sill, Gibson, Zarah, and Wallace come to mind. Headquarters of the Smoky Hill Military

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District, a few thousand square miles of frontier West, was Fort Riley. It was the remount station for the U.S. Cavalry in the West, and was commanded by George Armstrong Custer.

The District included Fort Wallace on the Smoky Hill Trail. Troops stationed at Wallace (on the western edge of the circle) fought more skirmishes and battles during the period of the so-called Indian Wars than troops from any other military post on the continent. The action against the Southern Cheyennes on the Washita took place in this circle.

The southern arc of this circle of history takes in the Indian Nations, the Trail of Tears, and the land rush to the Cherokee Strip. It comes close to the site of the court where Judge Parker—the Hanging Judge—held sway.

It is the home of a magnificent grazing industry—the Flint Hills of the tallgrass prairie. Early Europeans told with wonder of the grasses of our area. A horseman could ride out into a stand of turkeyfoot grass, it was said, take a seedhead in each hand, and tie the stems in a knot across the saddle pommel. A year or two ago I read a review of a pretty good western in which the reviewer snorted with ridicule at a phrase about the tallgrass prairie "as high as a horse's back." I'm afraid the reviewer's ignorance was showing. A rider can still tie the knot over the saddle horn. I know, because I've done it. From the window of this room I can see a seedhead on a clump of big bluestem grass (or turkeyfoot). It's just beyond my pickup truck, there, and measures barely under seven feet tall.

This grass, along with several others, forms the grazing industry. Cattle were, and are, shipped from Texas and Mexico to fatten each summer on the native prairie. It's also the home of early rodeo. The 101 Ranch of Oklahoma was part of our circle. Bill Pickett, the black cowboy who invented steer wrestling, worked there. That event was originally called bulldogging because Pickett did it with his *teeth,* biting the steer's nose.

The Pony Express started here, and one original station still stands.

A lot of the romance of the West revolves around the era of the river steamboats. These specially designed craft, with a shallow draft and stern wheel, were "prairie steamers." Many of them plied the Kansas River carrying passengers, freight, and military loads.

In the 1860s the railroads put an end to the steamboat industry when they received permission to bridge the rivers. You just can't drive a steamboat under a railroad bridge.

The steamers were sold to companies operating on the upper Missouri River. It's worthy of note that the survivors of the Custer fiasco on the Little Big Horn were brought back to civilization on the *Far West,* one of the originally Kansas-based steamers.

There are interesting vignettes of the West that relate to the circle of history. The Pony Express started here, and one original station still stands. The effort was a failure, lasting only a couple of years until the telegraph and the railroad made such a mail route obsolete. But it lives in the American memory, along with Windwagon Smith's attempt to sail a real "prairie schooner" on wheels across the plains. It's not quite as flat as Smith imagined.

The Butterfield Stage, traveling the Smoky Hill trail initially, was more successful. It carried passengers, freight, and mail, and its name is part of the West.

The original *Little House on the Prairie* of literary and TV fame is in the circle of history, as are a number of other creative efforts. Some time ago, I had given a lecture a few miles west of home. Afterward, an elderly man with a twinkle in his eye asked if I'd like to hear his story. I *would.* That's where a writer *gets* stories.

When he was about ten, he related, his dad landed a pretty good cowboying job. They even had a frame house to live in, with plastered walls. It was the best they'd ever had, but his mother was scandalized. Somebody had scribbled all over the walls with pencil, charcoal, paint, and crayons. She could hardly wait to get to town to buy a little lime for whitewash to cover up the vandalism.

"I sort of hated to see her do that," the old man told me. "I was enjoyin' them. They were pictures of horses, cowboys, cattle, Indians, and buffalo. Real nice sketches."

"That's interesting," I commented. "Did you ever find out who put them there?"

"Well," he confided, eyes twinkling with mischief, "we asked around. Folks said it was some drunk cowboy named Fred Remington."

This was the site of the original sheep ranch of the great artist Frederic Remington, near Peabody, Kansas.

It puts history close to today, doesn't it? Anytime I speak to the east of our home, I get Jesse James stories. "He stopped at our house once . . ." "Jessie lived for a while on the next farm to ours . . ." Things like that.

My grandfather, when he was sixteen, drove into Kansas from Iowa with an ox team and a cov-

ered wagon. He had some pretty good stories, which probably stimulated my interest some.

His most spectacular story, though, I never heard him tell. I got it through others in the family. When he was six, the youngest in a family of several boys, they were living over in the edge of Missouri. They were Northern sympathizers, and there was a lot of bloodshed going on. William Quantrill's terrorists were raiding along the border.

They stopped at the house one day and asked my great-grandmother where her husband was. She sent them off in the wrong direction and then sent the six-year-old running down to the hay meadow to warn his father.

The guerrillas, realizing they had been tricked, returned and demanded of the older boys where their dad was hiding. They managed to convince the riders that he had gone to town, but they decided to camp there. The dad spent the night in one of the haystacks with the six-year-old in his arms, praying that the child wouldn't cry out.

When morning came and they were able to crawl out, my great-grandfather had decided: "We're going to Iowa until this is over!"

That's pretty close to being part of history. The flip side of that coin is that my wife had a great-uncle who rode with Quantrill. It's quite possible that an ancestor of mine spent the night in a haystack to keep from being shot by an ancestor of hers!

Well, we've settled all that between us, now.

So, back to the original question: "Why do you live here?"

I guess maybe the answer is in the first part of that girl's question: "If your books are successful . . ." I'm writing about the West. It all happened here, where my roots are deep in prairie sod. Why would I want to live anywhere else?

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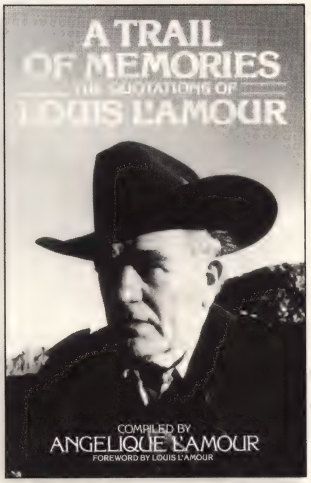

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ELMORE LEONARD

A CONVERSATION WITH

ELMORE LEONARD IS ONE OF THE MOST recognizable names in American fiction. Even the dwindling number who have not read his novels (thirty-one of them to date) have seen his name perennially atop best-seller lists and in the screen credits for such films as *Joe Kidd, Stick, Fifty-two Pickup*, and *Mr. Majestyk*. He is as closely identified with the crime novel as Stephen King is with the horror story and Louis L'Amour is with the western.

But Elmore Leonard is also the author of distinguished western novels, among them *Hombre* (1961), which was selected by Western Writers of America as one of the twenty-five best westerns ever written; *Valdez Is Coming* (1970), also considered a classic; and such stories as "3:10 to Yuma" (1953), which appears regularly on "best ever" western lists. (All three of the above Leonard westerns were made into successful films.)

BY DALE L. WALKER

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF *ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE*

"My first sale was to *Argosy* in 1951. I was twenty-five, with visions of becoming the hot kid."

Leonard was born in New Orleans in 1925. His writing career may be said to have begun when he was ten and living with his family in Detroit. He read a serialization of Erich Maria Remarque's novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front,* in the *Detroit Times* and promptly wrote his own World War I story, in the form of a play, which was staged in his fifth grade class, with the desks serving as No Man's Land. As a student at University of Detroit High School, Leonard wrote a story for a student publication, but gave no serious thought to a writing career until after the war (in which he served with the Navy's Seabees in the South Pacific) and his graduation from the University of Detroit in 1950 (with majors in English and philosophy). By then, Leonard was working in advertising and writing in his spare time.

His first professionally published story was a western—"Trail of the Apache," which appeared in *Argosy* magazine in December 1951. Another fifteen years would pass before Leonard would be able to devote himself full-time to writing (the sale of his western novel *Hombre* to the movies made that possible). But he continued to sell western stories to some of the best pulp and slick magazines of the day—*Zane Grey's Western, Ten Story Western, Dime Western,* and the *Saturday Evening Post*—while working in an ad agency.

In 1953, Leonard's first novel, a western titled *The Bounty Hunters,* was published by Houghton Mifflin. It was followed by *The Law at Randado* (1955), *Escape from Five Shadows* (1956), *Last Stand at Saber River* (1959), and *Hombre* (1961).

Between 1951 and 1961, he published some thirty stories and five novels, and made two movie sales—all of them westerns. His last published western novel was *Gunsights,* in 1979.

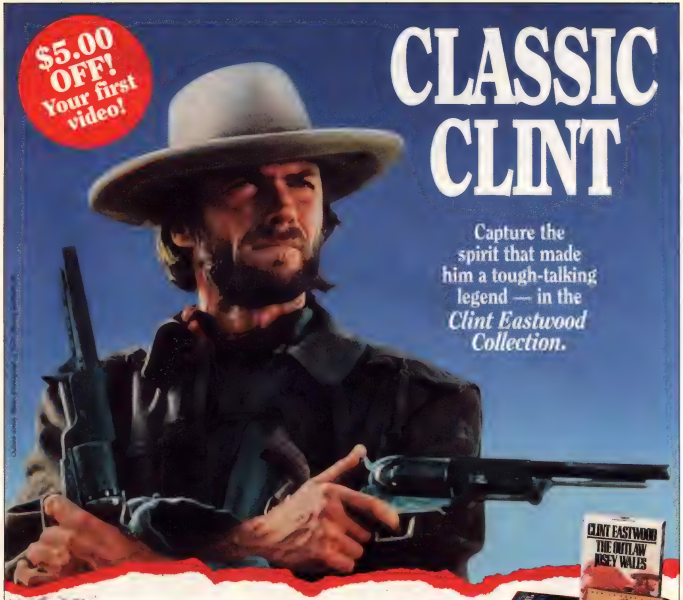
In 1968, Leonard switched from westerns to contemporary crime fiction, and in a few years had attracted national attention (including a *Newsweek* cover story) for such novels as *Fifty-two Pickup, City Primeval, Stick, La Brava,* and *Glitz.* Every Leonard book since *Glitz* has been a national best-seller: *Dutch Treat, Bandits, Touch, Freaky Deaky, Killshot, Get Shorty, Maximum Bob, Rum Punch,* and most recently, *Pronto.*

The *Washington Post* characterized his novels as "crime spiced with humor and social commentary." His admirers include fellow mystery writers such as Tony Hillerman and Donald E. Westlake, as well as such diverse celebrities as Alec Guinness and Andre Dubus.

In *The Fine Art of Murder,* a 1993 mystery reader's companion, Leonard is called "an incomparable storyteller noted for his brilliant dialogue, his intricate plots, and his humorous depiction of American culture."

Leonard is recipient of the Edgar and Grand Master awards from Mystery Writers of America, the Hammett Prize from the International Association of Crime Writers, and numerous other awards. He is the subject of a full-length biography (*Elmore Leonard,* by David Geherin, published in 1989 by Continuum) and an hour-long documentary (*Elmore Leonard's Criminal Records,*

Martin Balsam and Paul Newman (below) in the film based on Elmore Leonard's novel, *Hombre,* and Burt Lancaster (right) in *Valdez Is Coming.*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hen I was learning to write, my main inspiration was Hemingway."

produced by the BBC in 1991).

Leonard at sixty-eight is a relaxed, friendly, unpretentious man with a bristly gray beard; owlishly round, dark-rimmed glasses; and the engaging smile and calm, satisfied manner of a person who is doing exactly what he always wanted to do, and doing it successfully—very successfully. He is most often comfortably dressed in faded jeans, unbuttoned button-down shirt under a V-necked sweater, and sneakers. He works every weekday from 9:30 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.

In the reference book, *Twentieth Century Western Writers,* author Joe Lansdale says: "Elmore Leonard is not only an accomplished writer of novels, short stories, and screenplays about the Old West, he has carried western themes and attitudes into his nonwestern writing as well. . . . [He] is undoubtedly the best stylist working in the western field today, and his work cannot be recommended too highly."

Elmore Leonard responded to *LLWM*'s questions from his home in Bloomfield Village, Michigan.

LLWM: Since you've nearly always lived in the East, how did you come to begin your career writing westerns?

Leonard: Primarily because of the market. I loved western movies, having grown up watching Ken Maynard, Buck Jones, and those guys every Saturday afternoon at the show. But the major influence was the market. Forty years ago everybody was buying westerns: the better magazines—*Collier's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*—were buying them, and if you missed there you could submit to *Argosy, Blue Book, Adventure,* and on down through a dozen pulp magazines that were still doing business. Among the more prestigious pulps, *Dime Western* and *Zane Grey Western* paid two cents a word to beginners.

LLWM: *Argosy* bought your first story?

LEONARD: Yes, my first sale, a novelette called "Trail of the Apache" (their title) was made to *Argosy* in August 1951 and appeared in the December issue. I was twenty-five, with visions of becoming the hot kid, selling everything I wrote. And I did sell almost everything, except that a year passed selling to the pulps before I broke into *Argosy* again, and it was five years before the *Saturday Evening Post* bought a story. In between I was fortunate in making a couple of movie sales: *The Tall T,* from an *Argosy* novelette called "The Captives" (their title), and *3:10 to Yuma* from a 4,500-word short that appeared in *Dime Western* and paid ninety bucks after the editor made me rewrite the climactic scene three times.

LLWM: That first published story was a novelette; when did you begin writing novels?

LEONARD: I think I had written about a dozen shorts—in my spare time while working at the ad agency—before going for sixty thousand words. The book, *The Bounty Hunters,* was published simultaneously by Houghton Mifflin and Ballantine in 1953. I wrote five novels during the 1950s. I began writing the fifth one sometime toward the end of 1959 and it didn't find a publisher until the spring of 1961. The book was *Hombre.* The advance Ballantine paid was only about a third of what I'd gotten for the two previous books, published by Dell. It was a clear indication that the market for western fiction was in a serious decline. The reason? Television had taken over, with more than thirty westerns on during prime time by the end of the 1950s.

LLWM: How did the *Post* sale come about?

LEONARD: My agent during the 1950s, Marguerite Harper, represented the Glidden brothers—Luke Short and Peter Dawson—who appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* regularly. Marguerite did manage to sell one of my short stories to the *Post,* but my novels were rejected as serials because the writing was considered too gray and relentless, with not enough blue sky in the form of romance, family life, or comic relief.

LLWM: Who are some of your favorite western writers?

LEONARD: I remember *The Tall Men* as one of my all-time favorite books from the 1950s. It was written by Clay Fisher, a Will Henry pseudonym. Other writers I liked were Ernest Haycox, Alan LeMay, James Warner Bellah, Frank Bonham, Ben Capps, Elmer Kelton, Steve Frazee. I thought Louis L'Amour's *Hondo* was great; also Tom Lea's *The Wonderful Country,* Dan Cush-

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"*Hombre* was an experiment, the only book of mine written in the first person."

man's *Stay Away Joe*, John Cunningham's *Warhorse*, and Glendon Swarthout's *The Shootist*. I confess I haven't read *Lonesome Dove*, but consider the film version the best western movie ever made. Before seeing it, my favorite was *My Darling Clementine*.

LLWM: Were any of these writers inspiring to you when you were breaking in?

LEONARD: I think I was inspired by all of them, but can't say I tried to imitate the style of anyone, in particular. When I was learning to write (I'm still learning, for that matter, always trying to do it better), my main inspiration was Hemingway. During the 1950s I would open *For Whom the Bell Tolls* at random and start reading to get going on my own work. I thought of the novel as a western, taking place in the mountains with a lot of guns and horses. From Hemingway I tried to learn what to leave out—to be spare in my prose and use all of my senses in describing settings and situations.

LLWM: Living in Detroit and writing westerns—how did you manage to capture the flavor and feeling of the West?

LEONARD: The first thing I did, once I decided to set my stories in the Southwest, was subscribe to *Arizona Highways*. And once I had a stack of the magazines, I was all set. When I needed a description of the terrain, including the growth, trees, cactus, the kind of rock, I'd go through the magazines until I found a photo that was suitable. In my case this was better than being there, for the caption would describe trees and brush that I would never be able to identify. I did happen to visit Tucson while I was writing *Hombre*, then went home and rewrote my description of the Santa Catalina Mountains. I researched using reference books and source materials on what kind of guns were used, how people dressed—studying photos from the period, too—and concentrated on Apache tribes and the U.S. Cavalry, both very popular in western fiction in the 1950s. Two books that come to mind are

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think producers feel they can always do a western — get some cowboy hats from the property department and hire some horses."

The Truth about Geronimo and *On the Border with Crook*. There were always good stories about that period in *Arizona Highways*.

LLWM: People who know western literature regard your *Valdez Is Coming* and *Hombre* as among the best western novels of all time. Both were made into successful films. Are they your own favorites of your western work?

LEONARD: *Valdez* is my favorite. Published in 1969, it's based largely on a short story I wrote for the 1961 Western Writers of America anthology. It amazed me that the film version ended exactly the way the book did, with the bad guy choosing to back down rather than go for the gun. *Hombre* was an experiment, the only book of mine written in the first person. Because the main character is an enigma—no one in the book understands his attitude—I had to stay out of his head and tell all that happens from the point of view of a minor character.

LLWM: The western movie is having another of its periodic boom periods. New western films are being made, also new TV westerns. Do you have any idea why the western film seems to go through these spasms of boom and bust?

LEONARD: I think because film producers in general are spasmodic. They wait to see what type of film is making money and then come out with something like it—their own second-rate versions. In the 1980s it was thought that *Pale Rider* and *Silverado* could very well signal a western rebirth. But neither picture was financially successful, in Hollywood terms, so all the westerns that might have followed—a few more *Gunfights at the O.K. Corral*—languish in what is known as development hell. *Unforgiven* did

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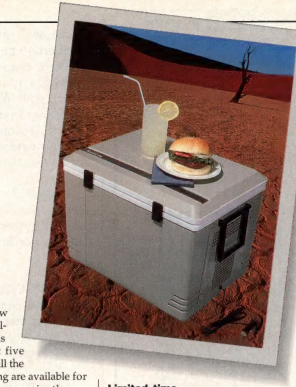
NASA space flights inspired this portable fridge that outperforms conventional fridges, replaces the ice chest and alternates as a food warmer.

By Charles Anton



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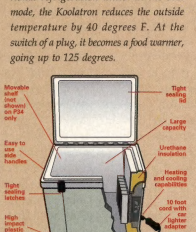
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quite well at the box office, so westerns again have a chance to make a comeback. But too many bad ones all at once could mean a quick end. Westerns, in the past, gave way to car chases and special effects, automatic weapons, spectacular explosions. And these pictures are still with us.

LLWM: Do you think the western is more symbiotically wedded to Hollywood fads and fancies than other forms of popular literature?

LEONARD: I think producers feel they can always do a western—get some cowboy hats from the property department and hire some horses.

LLWM: Do you make a distinction between the "traditional" western novel—the so-called "category western"—and the bigger, more historical stories that seem more prevalent these days?

LEONARD: No. To me, *Lonesome Dove*—or any novel set in the West a hundred years ago or so—is a western. Larry McMurtry knows how to write and knows what he's writing about. Simply to label a book a historical novel, though, doesn't lift it to a higher plane—doesn't mean the writing is better or the research done in more depth than a good classic western. A. B. Guthrie's mountain men novels I think of as prewesterns, in a class by themselves.

LLWM: Do you see the traditional western as alive and well?

LEONARD: In this part of the country [Michigan] I see quite a number of Louis L'Amour titles still on the shelves, with a few other names and some "adult" westerns. My publisher, Dell, has reissued seven of my eight western novels and Ballantine keeps the eighth one, *Hombre,* in print. Without really studying the market, I'm not aware of that much of a change. For forty years, at least, since I've been a member of Western Writers of America, we've complained that book critics in general tend to ignore westerns or treat them as second-class literature. When *Valdez Is Coming* was published, a woman reviewing for our local community paper said, "Ho hum, another penny dreadful." What can you do?

LLWM: Is there any chance that you might return to the western novel for a book or two?

LEONARD: *Gunsights* was the last one I did, in 1979. But I've written a short story for the forthcoming John Jakes-edited anthology and it felt good to be back in that period. So, it's quite possible I could write another one, even though I have the feeling it would be like starting over, learning again how to do it, now with a bit more emphasis on authenticity, especially in the way people spoke. (As good as *The Unforgiven* is, it's full of anachronistic language in the way obscenities are delivered.) Ten years ago my publisher at the time suggested I do a "big western" and I turned down the idea. But maybe now . . . why not?

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